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# DOCUMENTARY FILM

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other books by Paul Rotha

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THE FILM TILL NOW (*1930, and with Richard Griffith, 1949*)

CELLULOID: THE FILM TO-DAY (*1931*)

MOVIE PARADE: A PICTORIAL SURVEY

OF THE CINEMA (*1936, and with Roger Manvell, 1950*)

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PORTRAIT OF A FLYING YORKSHIREMAN

(*the letters of Eric Knight to Paul Rotha, 1952*)





# DOCUMENTARY FILM

*The use of the film medium to interpret  
creatively and in social terms the life of  
the people as it exists in reality*

*by*

PAUL ROTH

*in collaboration with*

SINCLAIR ROAD

RICHARD GRIFFITH

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## PREFACE BY JOHN GRIERSON

With long-standing courtesy to me, Paul Rotha has asked me to do yet another preface to yet another edition of *Documentary Film*. I appreciate the privilege, because the new edition is more complete than ever before, with Richard Griffith's special consideration of work on the American continent and Sinclair Road's wide survey of the eastern hemisphere to add to Rotha's own encyclopaedic grasp of the documentary story. I have always found this very complete acquaintance with documentary work, large and little, something to wonder at, although I saw the careful and meticulous beginnings of Rotha's records long years ago. It takes some of the weight from our other critical forays, dashing as some of them may have been: and we are all beholden to the historian of a development which time will recognise as one of the most interesting emanations of social democratic growth over a generation.

Perhaps it is because of this deep rooting of documentary in the growth of the times that I myself most appreciate the opportunities I have had to estimate its present bearings and possible future. Certainly the nature of the documentary film shifts with the times, and the old estimates, even the old theories, have to be seen anew. It is not the least so now, when again the clash of economic and political forces represents one of the great successive points of resolution. The documentary film today reflects this in its frustrations as well as in its expectations, as from its nature it must. This, of course, is the heart of all critical matter in regard to it today.

I take a recent example in a thoughtful piece in *Sight and Sound*.<sup>1</sup> It describes the documentary world of the time as The Land of Pog, and it is written by one of the younger documentary men, Quentin Dobson. The analysis is just enough so far as it goes, for he correctly remembers that documentary in its early days 'was sickened with the synthetic world of contemporary cinema . . . decided to put the real world on the screen . . . was

<sup>1</sup> December, 1949.

## PREFACE

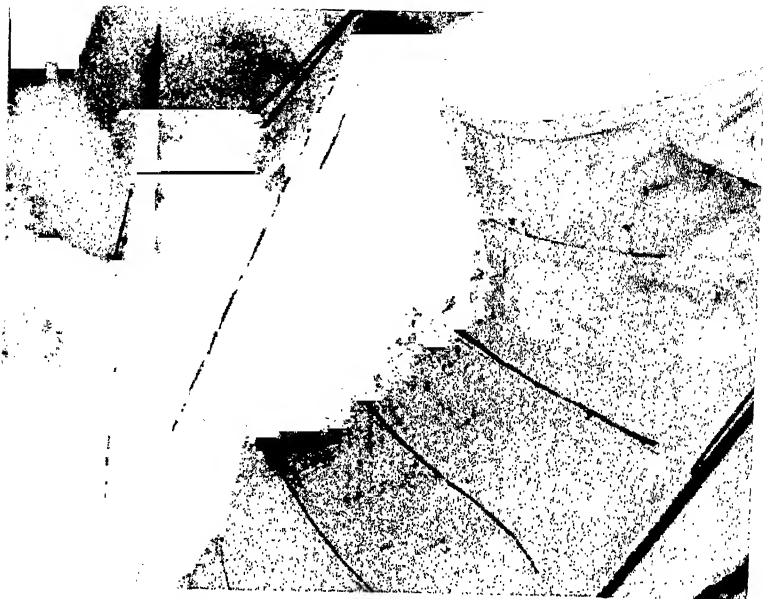
reporter and evangelist as well . . . came down heavily in favour of all that was bright, new and humanitarian'. He likewise almost correctly estimates—referring of course only to British documentary—that he 'finds it hard to believe that his contemporaries can make a similar claim . . . and (that now) too often filmmakers regard ideas as an unfortunate stumbling block to an otherwise good racket; and all is spoiled in concession to the man who foots the bill'. He asks, as so many are asking—it is 1951 remember—'whither has fled the visionary gleam . . . and is the documentary movement to fizzle quietly out, in preoccupation with technique at the expense of ideas?' He asks finally that documentarists 'turn outward, pre-occupy themselves less with the technicalities of presentation on the screen and *more with the portrayal of flesh and blood*'. The italics are mine.

This is very much what many are thinking today, and not only in the United Kingdom; and it will, I know, concern all who, reading Rotha's book, begin to match their new understanding of documentary principles with contemporary demonstration. But is it, first of all, that Mr Dobson has proved a trifle too simple in his analysis, or shall we say, not complete enough? Yes, there was the runaway from the synthetic world of contemporary cinema, but so also, as I remember, did documentary represent a reaction from the art world of the early and middle twenties—Bloomsbury, Left Bank, T. S. Eliot, Clive Bell and all—by people with every reason to know it well. Likewise, if it was a return to 'reality' it was a return not unconnected with Clydeside movements, I.L.P.'s, the Great Depression, not to mention our Lord Keynes, the L.S.E., P.E.P. and such. Documentary was born and nurtured on the bandwagon of uprising social democracy everywhere: in Western Europe and the United States, as well as in Britain. That is to say, it had an uprising majority social movement, which is to say a logical sponsorship of public money, behind it.

Nor should anyone miss the fundamental point that this was true even though Conservative and National Governments were actually involved. I like to put it ironically by saying that I have enjoyed a more radical conception of documentary and a richer, more imaginative, sponsorship from the Tories than I have had from those who have been thought to be my political brothers-in-arms. But this is not an accident, nor to be put down, altogether, to the historic pre-occupation of social democratic ministers

DRIFTERS (British 1929)

E.M.B. Film Unit: *directed by* JOHN GRIERSON



GRANTON TRAWLER (British 1934)

E.M.B. Film Unit: *directed by* GRIERSON and ANSTEY

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CONTACT (British 1932-33)

British Instructional Films: *directed by* PAUL ROTH

## PREFACE

with platform techniques, nor to the inevitable overlaying of the imaginative by the new bureaucracy which Socialism-in-power swept in from the suburban intelligentsia. The fact is that the first period of the social democratic urge was in the hands of the Tories and Liberals, and we had the advantage of a period in which we could develop our concern for 'reality' without disregard for the loyalty to lyricism and 'flesh and blood' which Conservative and Liberal partisans inevitably retain as almost a plank in a political platform. In that sense, *Night Mail* and *Housing Problems* were the films of a Tory regime gradually going Socialist, just as *The Plow That Broke the Plains* and *The River of Pare Lorentz* were the films of that good Tory squire, F.D.R., also, though much more gradually, going Socialist.

Think, however, how different it was bound to be with Socialism in power. It has, like all parties, had to recognise, and insist on, its own success. Slums? The day of the slums is over. Unemployment? We have the assurance of full employment. Fair shares for all? We have them, we have them. Moreover, it is in its way true. Relatively speaking, it is true of the Clyde and Jarrow and South Wales, and that is why Herbert Morrison invokes the slogan 'Ask your Dad'. I myself hardly need to, for I was there in my youth and know. Relatively speaking, it is true if you consider the enormous social achievement which the National Health Act represents. If it is not true—and this is where Social Democracy was from the beginning bound to be a compromise Socialism—it is when you think over to the social patterns of others elsewhere and everywhere. I write this not to complain, however, but to analyse, for it means two things, one negative and one most positive. The negative is that social democracy has enough on its local plate to withstand the naïve enthusiasm of reformists, even if they are also documentarists. The positive? Let's take Quentin Dobson's question: 'Whither has fled the visionary gleam?' It is not fled at all. So far as such obvious social fronts as were occupied in the 'thirties are concerned, it is there, wherever the backward peoples—or as we now more sensitively call them, the under-developed peoples—are to be found. The young men may talk abstractedly of the return to 'flesh and blood', but it is there most obviously if they would only ease off their fat metropolitan seats and take to wherever the peoples' problems—within the practical terms of reference which social democracy in its present phase permits—

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are to be faced. Of this I feel sure. The sponsorship which once so easily allowed 'flesh and blood' to the handling of British social problems must progressively allow the same wider freedom to the handling of the social problems of the Colonial peoples: that is to say, their social problems up to the point of sharp economic and political issue.

If indeed I were facing the issue of sponsorship as a young man, content with the earlier dream of documentary, I would draw a conclusion from the appearance of *Daybreak in Udi*, and its kind. Politics is the art of the possible, and the great possible for liberal documentary sponsorship today must, I say, lie where nations have progressively to face world opinion, progressively have to give an account of their stewardship, progressively have to consider, through Colombo Pacts and Fourth Points, the relationship of social progress to political and economic events. Which reminds me. The documentary film, even under Tory sponsorship, was the first and only true art form produced by social democracy, and did more than later Socialist leaders are inclined to allow to make their victory emotionally real: but the greatest single force in establishing the first majority social government was, of course, the discovery in the blitzes of the war that the social front, in its reality and also in its promise, was in the long run the only key to effective defence. Napoleon had said it long before. The point is basic, however 'defence' is interpreted.

All this, I know, will not satisfy the frustrations and the expectations which Quentin Dobson expresses. Why should it? It represents only one aspect of the contemporary problem, only one outlet for creative effort towards the 'flesh and blood' which is missing. Moreover, it may seem to represent an opportunist approach which will not satisfy those who look, shall we say, to ultimate political satisfactions and feel that to serve present social progress in certain strategic parts of the world is to ally oneself with reaction. However that may be—and I take the view that social progress is an end in itself—let's see what can be done on other fronts.

One prominent level of attack on documentary today is on the present state of sponsorship in the Western world. Dobson, like all the others, goes for it, wondering why its liberalism is declining and by what magic we earlier operators secured its rich co-operation. Again, I repeat, there was no miracle about it, but a true historic root, then as now. Look at the facts. It is true that

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the Socialist powers have a logical interest in stemming the tide of Radicalism. It is true that they have engaged so much of their income in social reform that they have a professional stake in economies which affect any matter which is not of apparent political significance or justification. It is true that the new bureaucracies, hemmed in as they must be, are not as gay or adventurous in the courtesies of life as the old. Nor can be, for the background of planning and security which we once preached has come to affect us in our own estate, as sponsors increasingly secure themselves not only against the uncertain factors in documentary film-making but against their blatantly risen costs. Finally, the conclusion from these premises is also true. They lead to the major anomaly of Government film sponsorship today. In their pursuit of economy, their new ordered working of briefs, their strict concern with what is readily and publicly justifiable, they have of course lost their way to the heart of the matter. For the paradox of the film in public information is that the peculiar powers of the medium are not engaged except there is warmth of seeing: for whatever reason, lyrical or social, or, as they used to say, dramatic. If such factors are not engaged, it is as well for the briefers to spend their money on the more economical and necessarily duller media of exposition. That is precisely what they are doing.

Yet I see behind this situation something deeper than the mere dullness of mind of an over-involved, over-driven social democratic phase. It is noticeable in the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Denmark, Holland and the Western world generally, that this tightening of the sponsorship for documentary has taken much the same course. It is a vivid irony to me that at the very time my old regime in Canada was being strait-jacketed, I found myself responsible for the self-same strait-jacketing of the Government set-up in the United Kingdom.

Now the British have ways of doing things which are relatively mature in their sense of public presentation, but the fact of the matter may not be the warmer for that. One of the crucial decisions in the re-ordering of the documentary set-up in the United Kingdom was the decision to separate the authority for the production and distribution of home films from the authority for foreign-going films. It meant, if it meant anything, that international political relationships were of such an order that every word and image had to be brought under the professional control of the diplomat. *Pari passu* went the decision to bring every aspect

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of home information under the jurisdiction of the department concerned. They say that only ministerial rivalries were involved, but, taken together, these decisions indicated that there was going to be no general unleashing of propaganda forces as we have had it at other times; and that whatever there was to be, was going to be under the strictest ideological control. Let's face it. Here we have a clear characteristic of the period. It can, of course, be seen even more plainly, not to say blatantly, in countries like Canada and the United States, where the arts of public expression—not to say the sensibility to liberal values—are still in the primitive stages of development. Our good old liberal attitude to documentary, and the liberal tradition of personal freedom which went with it, have been declared, in terms often arrogant and illiterate, to be a public danger; and not even the normal decencies due to tried public servants and artists have been observed. But it is the fact, however put and however personally it may apply, that matters. In these days, political issues are such that the personal freedom so many innocently seek cannot readily be expected where Government funds apply and inevitable propagandist effects on mass-audiences are involved. The very warmth and commanding physical power which are the pride of the documentary idea are its chiefest limitation today, save where documentary is engaged in patent pursuit of orthodox policies.

Now, in almost all the criticism of the documentary position today it is implied that the patent pursuit of orthodox policies does not allow of such warmth and such commanding physical power. It is implied that freedom beyond the orthodox political policy is necessary. This can only mean one or other of two things. The first, the 'innocent' meaning, is that the search for 'flesh and blood' has no political significance—and that we shall be content with the birds and the bees and the cigarette trees of lyricism and drama, with absolutely no root in, or reference to, ultimate political satisfactions. If so, there is certainly a successful case to be made for it; for the imaginative possession of, say, the English Spring, is as important to national morale and the willing acceptance of Government—any Government—as Britain's brilliant Health Act itself. But if there is a less 'innocent' meaning in the attack, and what we are really saying is that we want again to be radical beyond our time, then I think a sense of political humour ought to be brought into exercise.

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If it may console those who presently wonder how to be left of our present political centre, at political centre's expense, let me admit that for a short period I missed the point. I thought too much in the immediate post-war period of the analogy of the 1919 post-war period. I thought there would be a lull before the new storm, of some ten years or thereabouts. I thought that the war-time discovery of social fronts and the conjoining of the Roosevelt liberal force with that of British Conservative-Socialism would, for a period, command the political scene in the Western world and its related territories: that in the home field it would bring new reforms to the Southern States as to the East End of London; and, in the foreign field, to the sovereign poverties of Latin America as to the unsovereign poverties of Africa and the East. It was, of course, not on the cards, whether in the name of Chisholm of W.H.O., Orr of F.A.O., Huxley of Unesco, or myself. As the *Chicago Tribune*, the State Department, Edgar Hoover and Senator Bill Benton with his World Radio Network quickly announced, the war was on before the peace was started. No one should mistake, therefore, where documentary, costing what it does, gets off. It gets off where events and their interpretation by the forces in power allow it to get off at. The rest, however you slice it, is not art but politics. But who, for that matter, will say that the prospect is not as wonderful as ever it was in the whole history of mankind?

For those who are not immediately or professionally concerned with the political task as such, I have already noted certain promising fronts on which, within stated limitations, a man may richly work. The work to be done for the undeveloped peoples is enormous, whether it be in teaching new techniques and social patterns, or in reflecting the great and wonderful force they represent in our contemporary world. I have noted that the battle for lyricism can be fought and won, even in such pre-occupied areas as present-day Whitehall, if the young men will give their hearts to it; for this is so much within the logic of the present phase of politics that if the Socialist ministers do not encourage it, be sure the Conservative ones most promptly will. Likewise, I have suggested that there is nothing in the present situation to prevent all sorts of approaches to the sponsorship of 'flesh and blood', so long as it is the flesh and blood of orthodox political policy. There are forces within the more powerful Western regimes who would give much for a school of docu-

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mentary which will preach the British way of life, the American way of life, etc., in the strategic areas of the world and bring alive Western 'democratic' principles to those exposed to other-than-Western 'democratic' principles. There is, so to speak, still money in Magna Carta if you want it that way. *Chacun à son godt*. We have, as I write, the interesting spectacle of Canada, from the environs of Duplessis and mediaeval pre-revolutionary Quebec, planning a programme which will teach the European heirs of the revolutions of '79 and '48, what their great-great and great-great-great-grandfathers were fighting about. God rest the soul of Mackenzie King! Similarly, anyone can be as lyrical and human as he likes on a theme which, like the Rhine, might have its effect on Eastern European loyalties. For E.C.A., or O.E.E.C., will be there at his elbow; and to tell the truth, to this moment, they have been most imaginatively at various elbows, seeing precisely, as professional propagandists should, where identities of interest can be established between frustrated liberals and their American terms of reference. On a bet, anyone with a care for W.H.O., or F.A.O., or Unesco will find a friend in E.C.A., though the terms of the contract will also be precise. So it goes, as it must; but so too it goes where other and different political orthodoxies are involved.

For the purpose of this analysis I am, therefore, in the position to register a double prospect of comfort, with Marshal Tito, King Farouk and Dr Malan not by any means to be disregarded as potential, most generous, sponsors of all adventures into their particular areas of 'flesh and blood'. If, as an old radical, still very conservative in my memory of what the Clydeside taught, I note all these courses and choose otherwise, it is because of my belief that there is yet another true dramatic implication in the phase through which we are passing. The Clydeside cult was the most humanist in the early Socialist movement. This was its deep political weakness, as Lenin himself pointed out, and men like James Maxton came practically to demonstrate. But while recognising this, as one must, the over-riding humanist factor did not thereby lost its ultimate validity. It has seemed to me, on the other hand, to assume more and more validity as the harder forces of political organisation have taken control of the thoughts we had and the sympathies we urged. For myself, I shall only say that what I may have given to documentary—with the working man on the screen and all that—was simply what I owed to my

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masters, Keir Hardy, Bob Smillie, and John Wheatley; and no one will understand me better in this than the Rt. Hon. Walter Elliot who calls himself a Tory. But still larger forces have, over the generation, been following the line of remaining ever close to the people and, in the very midst of Socialist success, expressing their disquiet lest the contact be lost. Bernard Shaw from his earliest period and H. G. Wells in his later disappointed period were peculiarly aware that the progressive order they so greatly urged had its other and counter-half in the rich and variant force of human beings themselves. That is why G.B.S. was so quick to qualify his own arguments and even demolish them as he called up his images of the life-force or produced his Doolittles and Undershafts as token of continuing reality. That too is why our social democratic generation had almost of necessity to produce G. K. Chesterton and D. H. Lawrence and declare, sometimes with passion, that there could be no unity without difference and no progressive ordering of society without creating a complementary hunger for variety.

One sees now a strange, almost perverse, dislike in high quarters for the celebration of regional vitalities, and for anything that savours of satiric reference to the new and wondrous forms of the Socialist state. You can trace it all the way from ministers and their P.E.P. boys to the B.B.C. This is to be expected of Socialism-in-early-power; for its first efforts were bound to put restraints on the hopes of the working people who brought it to power; and it could not do other than concentrate first on the centralised plan. But for these very reasons, the perversion of ultimate progress can be but momentary and one is not the less aware of this in the light of Socialist experience elsewhere. From this I deduce that we shall be finding the people again in the regional variation, in satire of the very forms which are presently our pride, and in description of the living reaction to the changing social patterns everywhere. Our social democratic ministers may not directly finance it yet, at least not in the name of public information, and that is just too bad, of course, for the Crown Film Unit and such. But, on the other hand, if the coincident hunger for variation, or the *elan vital*, or whatever you like to call it, emerges with the logical necessity that I have suggested, it must appear in terms of theatre demand. If so, it cannot fail to interest the economists of the film industry and the Boards of Trade who stand now, more and more deeply, behind them. So,

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with any luck, you may play the swings as well as the roundabouts. I look on the happy success of the Italian films recently, the miraculous return of Charlot and the prospering fortunes of my old friend Joe Burstyn in the 'art' theatres of the United States, and I think I see a light. Dare I say it? In spite of all Hollywood and State Department evidence to the contrary, it may be that there is also a gal in Kalamazoo.

With which, let me invite you one and all to look upon the record and make your own estimate of where so great and present a medium is now to go.

JOHN GRIERSON

Caistone, Wilts.

*February, 1951.*

## FOREWORD TO FIRST EDITION

I have written this book to replace the theoretical discussions in *The Film Till Now*. Revision of the catalogue part of that survey of cinema must wait until further time and opportunity arise.<sup>1</sup>

This new book is not in whole addressed to the practitioners of cinema, nor is it intended for the person who sees the film simply as an art. Its aim is to convey something of the social and economic basis upon which a certain method of film-making—that which we have called ‘documentary’—is now being built to fulfil certain purposes at this moment of political apprehension and social disintegration.

Briefly, I look upon cinema as a powerful, if not the most powerful, instrument for social influence today; and I regard the documentary method as the first real attempt to use cinema for purposes more important than entertainment. If the reader associates with cinema only a repetition of senseless stories revolving round, for the most part, second- or third-rate actors, then he will completely fail to comprehend the significance of the documentary movement. If he has permitted the story-film, in its function as a provider of universal entertainment, to blind him to cinema’s other and wider uses, then the discovery of the existence of documentary as something more influential will probably surprise him.

It is not my aim, as some will undoubtedly be quick to assume, to decry or limit the functions of the cinema as entertainment. I derive too much pleasure from many fiction films to make such a dogmatic plea. But I do ask recognition of the fact that the story-film, with its artificial background of studio and stars, with its subjects dictated by profit-making and personal ambition, is only *one* kind of film; that the technical and cultural achievements of the cinema of the future are more likely to come from the field of documentary and journalistic film than from the studios of entertainment.

<sup>1</sup> Revised edition, Vision Press, 1949.

## FOREWORD TO FIRST EDITION

Unfortunately, the commercial success of cinema has led many of us to believe that the value of a film lies in its power to create immediate sensation. That belief has done incalculable harm to cinema and transitory good only to its exploiters. It represents an attitude which must, under present economic conditions, be closely associated with the film made for amusement. Documentary, on the other hand, must meet the acid criticism of time. Its aim is no Saturday night hit or miss. Its message is for a community. Its purpose is not only to persuade and interest imaginations today but several years hence. For this reason, and for the many others dealt with later, I suggest that documentary demands greater production cares, more skilful craftsmanship and a more profound reasoning behind its choice of theme and its approach to material facts than does the story-film. If its aim were simply to describe for historical value, accuracy would be its main endeavour. But it asks creation in dramatic form to bring alive the modern world. It asks understanding of human values and knowledge of the issues governing our society today as well as in the past. It asks for the mind of the trained sociologist as well as the abilities of the professional film technician. Thus, in criticism, the functions and development of the documentary film should be kept distinct from those of the amusement cinema. To draw these distinctions, together with an investigation into the documentary method itself, is my present intention.

Our very familiarity with everyday surroundings prohibits us from forming a true estimate of them. That is why the documentary film has an important purpose to fulfil in bringing to life familiar things and people, so that their place in the scheme of things which we call society may be honestly assessed. The world of documentary is a world of commerce and industry and agriculture, of public services and communications, of hygiene and housing. It is a world of men and women, at work and leisure; of their responsibilities and commitments to the society in which they live. But really impartial discussion of the economic, political and social systems which control our citizenship immediately assumes the air of heresy. Hence documentary and its exponents are always open to suspicion. Criticism of accepted ideas is usually considered offensive. Anyone who throws doubt on accepted beliefs is subject to attack. Your documentarist is, in this respect, continually in a pillory. He must be prepared to respect that position.

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In the original plan for this book I had intended dealing with the importance of the cinema as a factor in modern education. But, as the book progressed, it became clear that the educational film should be considered separately from the documentary movement. Without embarking on a discussion of the whole problem of education, it can be easily seen that the cinema is a most fitting instrument for bringing about enlightenment in the child mind. That is why I, personally, place a higher value on the so-called general illustration film than on the direct teaching, or instructional, film. If it is not to supplant the teacher, which is not desirable, the latter type of film at its best can be but an animated pictorial lecture to supplement the blackboard and the magic-lantern. The general knowledge film, on the other hand, is wholly suitable to present in illustrative terms the whole world of work (or perhaps lack of it), administration and leisure which will confront the child in those awakening years preceding puberty; making it possible for a child's horizon to be occupied with something other than sport and sex-curiosity, so that it may grow up into a thinking, reasoning and questioning member of the community. The advent of a classless educational system reaching to a proper age is naturally desirable for this, because I believe that the child's mind between the ages of thirteen and sixteen is the most susceptible to the influence of the film. The instructional film fulfils a wholly different purpose. Its aim is, presumably, to teach direct facts and, in doing this, it has little connection with the imaginative background film. Here and there the two overlap. In some cases the material of 'impressionist' documentary is that of the instructional film. But fundamentally the two kinds of film must be considered apart. Hence I decided that in this present survey it would be wiser to deal only with the aims of the documentary film as a propagandist, social and illuminatory instrument, leaving to others the task of making a proper and full enquiry into the instructional field. Of the various books recently published, I give preference to W. H. George's *The Cinema in the School* because, despite its unrepresentative estimate of what is being accomplished in the educational film, it is the most sensible in outlook and is based on practical experience.

There is, however, one point which I feel should be made here. That is the significant fact that it is primarily the industrialist and the Government official and *not* the educationalist who are to-

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day making possible the development of the cultural film by providing the all-important means of production. Ostensibly serving the needs of propaganda or, if you prefer it, furthering the aim of public relations, documentary is at the same time fulfilling a definite instructional purpose. It is being enabled to do so by the financial resources of industry and commerce, an aspect of education and propaganda that is worth considerable contemplation.

P. R.

*October, 1935.*

## FOREWORD TO SECOND EDITION

The three years that have passed since the above Foreword was written have seen the documentary film movement grow in size and importance. The list of directors and their films at the end of this book shows the remarkable spread of this movement, which, in nine years, has been created out of good faith. In Britain, especially, the movement has expanded. From the original E.M.B. Film Unit, which worked in one small cutting-room in a back mews off Wardour Street, to six production units, a central advisory body and a documentary film workers' association (comprising over fifty members) is a development without precedent in the fluctuating history of the motion picture. At a time, as now, when the feature side of the British film industry is at a low ebb, when there are 8,000 unemployed film workers (excluding actors) registered on the books of the Association of Ciné-Technicians, the big schedule of documentary films for 1939 suggests that the documentary film is, for the time being at least, established on a sensible economic basis.<sup>1</sup>

Of great importance to documentary is the growing recognition of this kind of film-making in the United States. Until recently, few documentary films, as we know them in Britain, had

<sup>1</sup> Alas, the wheel has turned full cycle; after eight progressive years the British feature film industry is now (1951) once more in a parlous state and the greatly expanded documentary branch is this time experiencing its share of unemployment.

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been made by Americans. Then a movie-critic made *The Plow That Broke the Plains*. The success of Mr Lorentz's film and its successor, *The River*, together with the regular issues of *March of Time*, has now created a wide interest in the documentary film in the United States.

When, as a result of a joint invitation from the General Education Board of the Rockefeller Foundation and the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, I visited the United States from September 1937 to March 1938 with a group of representative British documentary films, it was gratifying indeed to find that not only were our work and ideas known but that people of all professions were anxious to see our films. Described by the Film Library as 'a new use of the motion picture for social analysis', the showing of our documentaries may, I trust, have helped to stimulate the current interest in non-fiction films in America. In New York City there is now an American Film Center<sup>1</sup> working in close relation with the Film Centre in London, as well as several film units seriously tackling the problem of maintaining a continuity of documentary production. The more this interchange of ideas, films and personnel between the two great democracies can be developed, the stronger will be the documentary film movement as a whole.

Thus, as an influence in our national and international life, the documentary film has arrived at a stage when we can ask to what end are all these films being made? We, in Britain, have now been spending the money of many big industrial corporations, national institutions and other official and semi-official bodies for nine years in making several hundred documentary films. Who is seeing these films and where are they being seen? What, if anything, are people getting from them? Many creative-minded people have been working at high pressure on these films, but to what purpose other than just film-making? What is the common policy behind this steady output and who determines it? Because it is widely realised that when a documentary film is made of, say, oil or gas or the Post Office, the purpose behind that film is not only that of naked or even clothed advertisement. If that were the only aim, the documentary film would not have attracted so much attention in influential quarters, nor would it have retained the services of so many creatively equipped workers at the modest incomes permitted by its economics.

<sup>1</sup> Vide pp. 228.

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These are some of the questions, together with a description of actual developments and significant new films, that I have tried to discuss in the additional chapter allowed to me by the publishers in this revised edition.

P. R.

Film Centre, London

*February, 1939.*

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Faith their documentary idea when this book was first written in the mid-thirties decreed that what we were working for would, in time, spread across the world. We could not then foresee how World War II would provide a sudden expansion of the machineries of production and distribution. Documentary could so easily have become an instrument of war propaganda alone and emerged a weakened, tarnished thing in 1946. But in Britain and Canada at least, we realised that not only was it urgent and vital to make films about the world at war but it was equally vital that some of us should go on making films about securing the human inter-relationships out of which could come the faith and strength for the peace. As early as 1942, films were being planned in Britain that anticipated the complex but basic international issues which would follow the shooting war. It was not only important to make films about Why we were fighting and How we were fighting but also about What we were fighting for.

The immediate post-war scene saw the historic preparatory meeting at Brussels in June, 1947, to draft the manifesto for the World Union of Documentary. A year later, in Czechoslovakia, the Union held its first and only meeting. Its definition of documentary, subscribed to by 14 nations, is worth restating: 'By the documentary film is meant all methods of recording on celluloid any aspect of reality interpreted either by factual shooting or by sincere and justifiable reconstruction, so as to appeal either to reason or emotion, for the purpose of stimulating the desire for, and the widening of, human knowledge and understanding, and

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of truthfully posing problems and their solutions in the spheres of economics, culture and human relations.' Out of the World Union idea arose a new body in Britain, called simply British Documentary, representing the film-makers, the film-users and other allied interests. It continued to meet at intervals over two years. Alas, like the World Union, it meets no more.

To begin with documentary backed Unesco heavily, providing some of its staff, and Grierson himself assumed executive office there in 1947. Alas, beyond conducting surveys (valuable certainly) and holding interminable committees, where has Unesco gone in the documentary purpose? With a miserable budget, the United Nations Film Board under Jean Benoit-Lévy made a bright show with a series of internationally-commissioned films, but where is it now?

When the Central Office of Information assumed some of the functions of the Ministry of Information in Britain in April, 1946, none of us foresaw that during the next six years the Labour Government was to shirk its responsibility to the film people who had served social democracy so loyally during the struggle of the thirties and in the strain of war.<sup>1</sup> In December, 1946, the British documentary group as a whole met and sent a manifesto to Mr. Herbert Morrison, then Lord President of the Council and responsible for the C.O.I. in the House of Commons. To quote from that document: 'Since the Central Office of Information took over certain functions of the Ministry of Information in April of this year, experience indicates that, as far as film production is concerned, the new machinery is not working with the smoothness and speed which is required by an efficient information service. The documentary film-makers have been as anxious to contribute to the successful operation of the new Government information services in peace-time as they were during the war. The record of Government film production since April 1st, however, does not measure up to past achievements nor to the demands of the moment. No major film, comparable with those produced during the war, has been completed. Delays and obstructions have been increasingly characteristic of the commissions which the documentary units have received. This decline

<sup>1</sup> The independent documentary units produced over 800 films for the National Government in the five war years without being afforded any of the priorities of equipment, materials and personnel that were the privilege of the official units.

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can be attributed to a number of causes, which in our opinion require urgent investigation'.

The result was promises, most of which failed to materialise, and a later vengeance which took its toll with gentlemanly velvet-glove tactics.

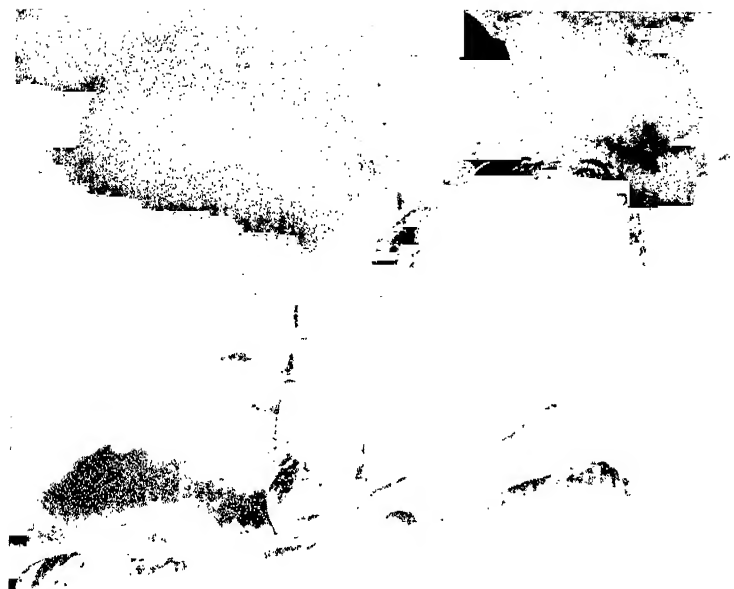
It was about that time when, questioned in the House about the C.O.I. films output, the Financial Secretary of the Treasury (who answered, when it was embarrassing for Mr. Morrison) stated: 'I can assure my Hon. Friend that the relationships of the Films Division of the C.O.I. with the Trade are happy, intimate, cordial and continuous'. The only continuity was that of frustration.

When John Grierson was eventually sent for by the C.O.I. in 1948—as a result, mark you, of constant pressure by the documentary people—it was virtually too late to restore confidence and inspire fresh initiative. Even Grierson's ruthless methods could not blow fire into the sterility of the C.O.I. and documentary. The units, one should remember, were by now dependent for some 80% of their work on Government sponsorship. That sponsorship was unreliable, supine and without any direction in the national sense. Grierson has pointed out that the only man in Government high circles who understood what documentary had done and could, moreover, still do was Sir Stafford Cripps.<sup>1</sup> To that I can well testify. But unhappily Cripps at that time had no say in the Government's information and publicity services, which were anyway a source of internal jealousy and dispute, it was said.

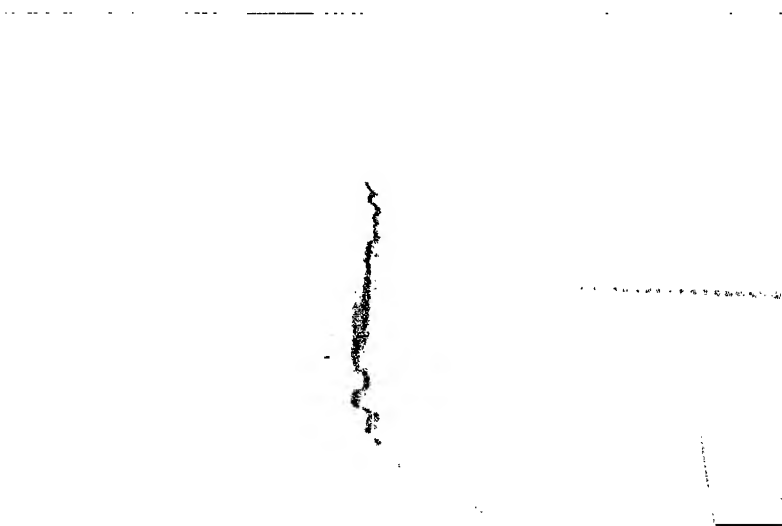
Let us be fair. The C.O.I. sponsored many films but, lacking the powers of initiative itself, they became more and more *little* films cautiously required by departments—safe, well-made but dull non-theatricals at ever-increasing cost but totally without the imagination and drama and faith that made British wartime and pre-war documentary the world's envy.

We should remember, of course, that times were changed. No longer did the Labour people want films to expose bad housing conditions; *Land of Promise* was uncomfortable to the Labour Ministry of Health! They wanted films to instruct local authorities how to build pre-fabs. The emphasis had passed from attack to construction; it was too early to praise. What could and should have happened under Government guidance was for the

<sup>1</sup> *Documentary* '51. (Edinburgh Film Festival.)



THE SONG OF CEYLON (British 1934-35)  
Ceylon Tea Propaganda Board: *directed by* BASIL WRIGHT



AERO-ENGINE (British 1933-34)  
E.M.B. Film Unit: *directed by* ARTHUR ELTON

COAL FACE (British 1936)

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larger documentary themes to have taken Britain's place in the world community of nations. A start was made (if I may say so) with the F.A.O. *The World is Rich*, but it was never pursued and that film itself, with its high hopes and fundamental arguments, became a source of embarrassment to its official sponsors.

Between 1946-51, the Labour people threw away one of their strongest aids to interpret and make acceptable the aims and ideals of social democracy, not just to Britain but to the world.

If I myself have been away from documentary making these past four years it is not because of any lack of faith. Rather it is because access to means of production of worthwhile measure has been elusive. Having had a fine and loyal unit disbanded because of economic pressures (a process that one day I will describe) there was no point in continuing in circumstances too heavily geared in opposition. At least I see our people making their mark today at the Transport Commission's Unit, at the Data Cooperative and in Television. From Jack Holmes in 1933 to Paul Dickson in 1947, it has been a group of co-workers that made one's heart warm. But in the post-war years the going became too undermined. We objected to being asked to make pictures by the tyros of Norgeby House and Whitehall that began in an anxiety of urgency and ended with the little bureaucrats not caring if the film was shown or not. We objected to being taught our craft of film-making by amateur civil servants who would have been of more use to the nation checking ration cards. We objected to being pushed around by pompous P.R.O.'s who knew less about the psychology of propaganda and the needs of information than we did about taxidermy or toxicology.

From 1941-45, the M.O.I. Films Division under Jack Beddington—with all his guesswork and good taste—had at least represented a consistency of loyalty and purpose. We could, and did, respect and serve it. After Beddington's resignation, however, the story had no quality or inspiration to observe. I do not easily forget the fight it was to get made *The World is Rich*, despite the fact that the initiative to make it came, we were told, from Downing Street itself. Once it was made, it became still another battle to get it shown. As always, our good friends in Fleet Street

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added their weight. I would not be for reviving the memory if it wasn't so typical of the suburban attitude of the Labour Government to the ever-pressing need for intelligent public relations.

One of documentary's greatest strengths over the years has been that we in Britain never allied ourselves to any political party. As Grierson put it: 'Our job specifically was to wake the heart and the will; it was for the political parties to make before the people their own case for leadership'.<sup>1</sup> This refusal to be henchmen or mercenaries—at any rate among the old guard—is an attitude towards social progress and reform that has been difficult for our sponsors, our critics, our politicians and even for some of our younger colleagues to understand. I believe it to be fundamental to the documentary idea and purpose. Without it, documentary as a movement in Britain would never have survived for twenty odd years. And in these dim days of misgiving and mistrust, I wish that some of our more intelligent politicians, publicists and educators could be induced to read and re-read those sections of Grierson's essays on propaganda, education and democracy.<sup>2</sup> Both they, and the nation they serve, would profit.

The years have seen, then, a tremendous expansion of the British documentary output, of the quantity of films made and the skills engaged. On the other hand, we must admit to a diminution of the imaginative approach without which the real lifeblood of documentary grows thin and feeble. The many awards and prizes gained at Venice and elsewhere by the British group demonstrate our success in the prescribed field of the specialised film. But in gaining this enviable status, the difference between the technician and the artist has become blurred. The technician who does what he is told becomes the whore of the P.R.O. and the sponsor. The artist with a mind and will of his own is feared by the tyro P.R.O. and the petit-bureaucrat. He is something unpredictable, undefinable and without label. Yet it is the artists, not the technicians, who have made documentary a living thing in twenty years of cinema and in world social advance. The fate of the Crown Film Unit when it lost its artists is too close and too sad to relate.

To make peace exciting—that has been the problem since the

<sup>1</sup> *Grierson on Documentary* (Collins, 1946), page 180.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* pp. 152-248.

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war. It can be done by the artist of faith and vision, but only if the sponsor will go along with him. The will to peace, the will to general betterment, the will to more happiness, security and warm relationships must be there in the sponsor before the artist can create. And evidence of that kind of goodwill has been hard to find in a world intent on rearming.

Here I am conscious that overmuch has been said about the British aspect of documentary, and I apologise to foreign readers. But, in all modesty, Britain has set the pace for so much in documentary (as in democracy) that our problems today may be yours tomorrow. In the wide assessment made later in this book, you will note the inspiring progress made by Denmark and Canada, to name only two countries which have adopted the documentary idea and developed it along their own lines to meet their own requirements. But, here, also, one suspects all is not wholly well. The Danish group has not sustained the effort and purpose which drew our attention to it three and four years ago, while the National Film Board has suffered certain restrictions of its activities that may tend to make its product more parochial and possibly threaten the virility which Griffith praises so warmly.

We are, in fact, at a frustration point in the whole documentary story because of the very age of anxiety—to borrow Auden's phrase—through which the world is groping. With the specialised agencies of the United Nations lacking funds to back world information and education services using all the media of mass-communication, with national governments rearming and suspicious and lacking the true liberal concept, with the frightening spectre of the world's two biggest nations upstarted by events into positions of leadership which neither is culturally equipped to fulfil—how is it possible for documentary to carry out the visionary ideas which inspired us for so long? The fact that Grierson—preacher, prophet and pontiff—now operates as a kind of Zanuck second-feature producer indicates that documentary may have to find new paths to follow.

The drying-up of government and industrial sponsorship for any but the most stolid kind of production, always excepting the specialist films of science and civics education, has not unnaturally turned documentary eyes towards the commercial feature world. With the remarkable success of the Hollywood 'semi-documen-

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taries' shot so largely on location, with the Italian post-war school of realism creating such a deep impression, and with our native Ealing Studios making a go out of a particular blending of comedy with realist techniques—there is, on the face of it, every chance that documentary could make good in 'features'. But the root problem of obtaining access to distribution—let alone to production—remains. There is no British equivalent of Stanley Kramer, Louis de Rochemont or the Pine-Thomas set-up. We have not in Britain the 250 odd specialist 'art' theatres that the Americans have. Denigrate the Hollywood system as we may, at least let us recognise that from it—albeit despite it—there has come a string of pictures the like of which we have not made in Britain. Zinneman's *The Men* and *The Search*, Clarence Brown's *Intruder in the Dust*, Joe Losey's *The Dividing Line* (*The Lawless*), John Huston's *The Red Badge of Courage*, de Rochemont and Kazan's *Boomerang*, de Rochemont's *Lost Boundaries* and half-a-dozen more—this is picture-making to some serious end combined with commercial release. Many of these films had no accepted 'star-names' and certainly most of them had stories and subjects that were not 'known' box-office. But by some miracle of perseverance such films get made. In England, to make a film without a 'star-name' and 'box-office' story approved by a distributor is a brave undertaking. The Colin Lesslie's of the British film industry are indeed rare.

In their six years of office the Labour Government tinkered with the British film industry in all its aspects save the key one—distribution. Advised repeatedly that it is no use making films unless you have the possibility of a fair deal for showing them, the Labour Government pumped some £6 million into production of the most oddly-assorted kinds with no plan behind its financing (until the so-called Groups Scheme) and no control over distribution. Had the National Film Finance Corporation at outset formed a kind of United Artists group of the best producer-director-writer teams and seen to it, legally if necessary, that their product got honest release, then the industry would have come clean up out of the crisis into which Mr. Rank ill-advisedly took it after the war.

Of the Italian neo-realist films plenty has been written. Here I need only add my respect and admiration for such a film as de Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*, with more restrained praise for *Miraclo a Milano*. Since *Open City* and *Paisan*, Rossellini has not given us

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cause for much comment although I number myself among the heretics who found merit in *The Miracle*. In France, Rouquier has done little since the lovely *Farrebique*, except for the brilliantly made *Le Sel de la Terre*. In Denmark, the Henning-Jensen's have turned to most interesting feature making of which *Ditte* was notable, while Storck in Belgium is also now working on feature production. The tremendous experience of seeing *Bicycle Thieves* has for me only been equalled by Luis Buñuel's extraordinary film *Los Olvidados*, made heavens knows how in Mexico City. Lacking any pretence to giving constructive conclusions, this violent and savage picture of adolescent delinquency in the slum outskirts of the city is a devastating exposure of our so-called civilised urban communities. It is a horrifying, uncanny indictment of social conditions which we know exist not only in Mexico City but in many another capital city nearer home. Buñuel's handling of a non-professional team of 'actors' is just as remarkable in every way as anything done by the Italians.

In England, many hopes are that the Group Three scheme of the N.F.F.C. will bring forth fresh inspiration. With public finance to produce six moderate cost pictures, with ample talent on which to draw, Grierson is in a unique position to do something of lasting importance for British films. Without flouting commercial requirements, he can develop the documentary idea in fictional form in a series of films in a way that no one else has had the chance to try. It is an opportunity that has long been awaited and, if it fails, may never come again.

Festival Year in Britain is a fitting year to be preparing this new edition for the press: a time for stocktaking. As with the revised editions of *The Film Till Now* and *Movie Parade*, I have sought assistance in this work because these days the world of cinema has grown too big to handle alone. Richard Griffith, now Curator of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library in New York, knows as much as anybody about the place of documentary in the Americas. His special work with the U.S. Army during the war brought him into close contact with the biggest single use of the motion picture ever made for instruction and orientation, and we are fortunate to have as an appendix his unique piece on the U.S. Armed Service's use of films. Sinclair Road came into our documentary world to prepare the final

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draft of the Arts Enquiry Report on *The Factual Film* in 1946, since when, after a spell as secretary to the Federation of Documentary Film Units, he has been active at Film Centre in London. I need hardly add that their contributions to this book—bringing the record from 1939 up to 1951—have been discussed in detail between us and their findings and judgements have my support.

The text of the earlier editions has been left substantially as it was. Here and there appropriate footnotes have been added. Although there is inevitably much set down in the original text about which I have subsequently had more mature thoughts, it does represent my views at that time and should therefore stand. Some of the arguments, but not necessarily the conclusions, appear to me today as pompous and dogmatic, but that I suppose is an experience common to all writers who allow their early work to be reprinted. My strictures on story-films may seem harsh, but it is only in the past ten years that we have seen commercial films with such social enlightenment as *The Grapes of Wrath* and *The Men*. I cannot help but think that such films were the direct result of the documentary example, just as in Britain films like *San Demetrio*, *The Way Ahead* and *Millions Like Us* were inspired by documentary precedent.

Sixty-three photographs have been dropped from the old editions and new ones added, bringing the survey as near up-to-date as printing conditions permit. The old appendix of documentary directors has been replaced by a list of one hundred films chosen by the three authors. My old comrade-in-arms, John Grierson, has written a characteristically aggressive new preface, for which he has my thanks.

Here, too, is a most fitting place to put on the record all documentary's thanks to those inspired and energetic organisers of the Edinburgh Film Festival, which had its fifth year this last summer. Especially to Norman Wilson and Forsyth Hardy do we owe a lot. This annual occasion for showing the most outstanding documentary, specialist and experimental films from all countries has succeeded also in becoming a meeting-place for creative filmmakers in all the many varied branches of our art. It has become a forum of discussion as well as a common-ground for self-criticism and new inspiration.

Finally, let us pay tribute here to those of our documentary world who are no longer around to sight their cameras and piece

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their celluloid together. To that great teacher and fine artist Robert Flaherty, without whom the documentary conception might not have arisen; and to Sergei Eisenstein, whose intellectual approach and technical skill influenced us so deeply. To Humphrey Jennings, poet and painter as well as film-maker, whose work was a special contribution to the British group notably during the war; to Wilfried Basse, the German director, whose last years in Potsdam were tragically marked with illness; and to the Australian Damien Parer who was killed in New Guinea. To Ruby Grierson—John's sister—who gave our British group so much in her warmth and understanding of human beings. To veteran cameraman George Pocknall, killed in one of London's blitzes, and to young Harry Rignold, whose camera was in hand on the beaches at Salerno. To Percy Smith, whose magnificent photography and amazing patience made the *Secrets of Nature* series a household name long before many of us reached tripod height. Lastly, to the many cameramen of whatever nation whose names we do not know but who were killed in that holocaust.

P. R.

Cuddington, Bucks.  
December, 1951.

#### *Postscript*

On January 29, 1952, the Conservative Government in Britain announced as an economic measure the closing down of the Crown Film Unit and the Central Office of Information's non-theatrical distribution and exhibition services. Despite very wide protest in Parliament and the Press, this action took effect at the end of March. Thus, the main instrument of Government film-making and distribution as a public service ended in the United Kingdom after a period of twenty-two years.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For the reproduction of still-photographs used to illustrate this third edition, acknowledgements and thanks are paid to the following:

1. British Film Academy, British Gas Council, Cinémathèque Française (Paris), Dansk Kulturfilm (Copenhagen), H.M. Stationery Office, Mexican Government, Museum of Modern Art Film Library (New York), National Board of Review (New York), National Film Board of Australia, National Film Board of Canada, National Film Library, Society for Cultural Relations with Soviet Russia, Soviet Film Agency, United Nations Film Board, United States State Department.

2. The Central Newsreel Studios (Moscow), Colonial Film Unit, Crown Film Unit, Film Polski (Warsaw), Kratky Film (Prague).

3. American Documentary Films Inc., British Instructional Films Ltd., British Movietone News Ltd., British Paramount News Ltd., Contemporary Historians Inc., Documentary Unit, India, E.P.I., Film Documents Inc., Films Internazionali, Robert J. Flaherty Productions Inc., G.-B. Instructional Ltd., G.-B. Picture Corporation Ltd., Green Park Productions Ltd., International Realist Ltd., March of Time Inc., Néofilm, Nerofilm, Paramount Picture Corporation, Pathe Newsreel, J. Arthur Rank Organisation Ltd., Realist Film Unit Ltd., R.K.O.-Radio Pictures Inc., Société Générale de Films, Sol Lesser Productions Inc., Strand Film Co. Ltd., Svensk Filmindustri, 20th Century-Fox Inc., Universal Films, World Wide Pictures Ltd.

We are also indebted to Messrs. Collins Ltd., the publishers of *Grierson on Documentary*, and to its editor, Mr. H. Forsyth Hardy for quoting passages out of that work.



1935

*'Art cannot be non-political.'*

MAYERHOLD

*'I look upon cinema as a pulpit, and use it as a propagandist; and this I put unashamedly because, in the still unshaven philosophies of cinema, broad distinctions are necessary.'*

JOHN GRIERSON

1951

*'Science and art belong to the whole world, and the barriers of nationality vanish before them.'*

GOETHE



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# I INTRODUCTION TO CINEMA

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# I

## INTRODUCTION TO CINEMA

### (i) *Social Aspects*

On frequent occasions we have heard it alleged that the enemy of social consciousness among the people is amusement. But it would surely be more accurate to say that it is rather the shape and style which, for various reasons, manufacturers give to amusement that is one of the real hindrances to the general ripening of social and civic responsibility.

The reason may even lie deeper. Drab conditions of daily occupations, lack of opportunity for individual obligation and collective enthusiasm, both apparently an inevitable part of modern life in a Western existence, are certain obstacles to the growth of social realisation and combine to make it easier for worthless entertainment to be passed off on the people in their search for relaxation. The barrier to improvement of entertainment seems to be not only the limits defined by the economic forces underlying production, but also the present state of society which makes possible the acceptance by the public of the existing type of amusement.

Fortunately, however, indications that present methods of ordering society are in some cases proving inadequate, together with the breakdown of so many long-cherished beliefs, are doing so much to stimulate public apprehension. Whether we want it or not, our era is proving such that influences over which we personally have no control are compelling us to take an active interest in the shaping of our future lives, unless we are unintelligent enough to allow others to dictate our fate.

Three main aspects of change confront us, says Mr Wells, 'the problem of arresting the onset and development of war destruction, the problem of socialisation and the reorganisation of distribution because of the change-over from scarcity to plenty, and the problem of monetary catastrophe due to the entire inadequacy of our financial organisation in the face of witless smartness and contemporary needs'.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The New America: The New World* (Cresset Press, 1935).

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Maybe it is true that most of us dislike facing strange and new changes. Maybe many of us do permit our personal wishes and private lives to obscure the great issues that confront civilisation. Maybe we do, in our desperate effort to exist at all, feel satisfaction in the winning of our own small struggles. But conditions and events are such that we cannot continue in this way of thinking and living for long.

With the constant repetition of strikes, assassinations, disasters, pogroms and every form of economic and political crisis that have crowded the social horizon of recent years, it is true to say that the individual is beginning to take a greater interest generally in public affairs and to enquire more into his relations with society than he has done previously in this so-called age of democracy. Faced with the unsettled state of social conditions that exists to-day, the ordinary man is demanding to know more of his position in international affairs, more of how things have been permitted to arrive at this apparently deplorable state and precisely what steps are being taken to meet the situation and by whom. Every day I come across persons who manifest increasing anxiety not only at the growing complexity of political and social problems but at the patent inability of those in power to find adequate solutions. That there exists, indeed, a lively demand for illumination into such matters the publishing profession and the controllers of radio discussions have been quick to realise.

Politics, for example, are daily becoming of increasing interest to millions of people who only a few years ago regarded their discussion as abhorrent. Not politics in the old meaning of the word, perhaps, but politics embracing economics, sociology, culture and, in many cases, religion. The almost terrifying political storms which have taken place during the last fifteen years and which are taking place today, together with the inevitable disturbances of the immediate future, are rapidly becoming the concern of the ordinary person, no matter how secure he or she may at present like to feel. Civilisation today, in fact, presents a complexity of political and social problems which have to be faced by every thinking person.

As soon as politics concern the shape and plan of our civic system, as soon as they concern our very homes and means of livelihood, it rests with the ordinary person to act not merely as a passive voter but as an active member of the State. His political cooperation, criticism and even active opposition is

demanded and he must be intelligently equipped to meet that demand.

The amount of interest, however, displayed by the ordinary public in the management of a country and its problems of government is obviously conditioned by the social system of that country. Where the functions of government are restricted, as under a parliamentary form, and the economic system is permitted full sway, comparatively small interest is forthcoming from the individual whose hands are full holding down his job (if he has one) or living at other people's expense. But as soon as the State exercises influence over factors contributory to society, such functions quickly become matters of public interest and provoke public attention.

In this country, for instance, immediately the State assumes control of, or attempts to define the activities of, some large vital service, which previously has been conducted for private profit, public opinion is at once asserted and criticism offered. That is true of electricity supply and the radio, and would be equally true should the railways, the cinema or the coal industry come under State control.

The more active interest taken in the conduct of public affairs and the more constructive criticism forthcoming from the public of the organisations which affect it most, the sooner does each individual appreciate the responsibility that lies on his shoulders as a member of the community. Only class-distinction, the root evil of our educational system, prevents the sincere co-operation of the members of the public with each other and provides an insurmountable barrier to the general endeavour of social advance.

On first consideration you would imagine that education has as its primary aim the equipping of the mind for citizenship, but upon reflection it is found that such a conception is quite different from that which actually obtains. In fact, there is every reason to believe that our educational system as a whole imparts neither the essential facts nor the inspiration required for the proper training of the mind for the duties of citizenship. To quote an educationalist who has the vision to observe these shortcomings:

'It should, then, be the aim of education for citizenship to equip the citizen for the "choice before him" so that he may support the better rather than the worse general policy. It should,

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indeed, be possible, even while still at school, and certainly later, to put before him the main facts and principles, whether these be moral, economic or political, which lie behind the chief questions of the day. It should be possible, for instance, both to explain the reasons, and to instil in him the desire for international co-operation rather than for nationalistic self-sufficiency; for the peaceful settlement of international disputes and disarmament rather than for the use of force—without finding it necessary to explain in detail the technique of the League of Nations or of any particular aspect of disarmament. . . .

'But the recognition of the need for deliberately training young people at school or college for their vocation as citizens is still far from being general, and too many heads of schools appear still to present insuperable difficulties with regard to the lack of time, to lack of qualified teachers, to the dangers of political bias and the like. This means that now and for some time to come at least, we shall have a generation of adults which has had little training for citizenship in school other than the generalised training of adaptation to life in a community and of loyalty to a particular institution. We cannot afford to wait. So unfitted is our present population to grapple with its problems and to help democratic institutions to work well, that the functions of the adult education movement in trying to make up for the deficiencies of school education in this respect is of urgent and vital importance.'<sup>1</sup>

It is true, of course, that as far as training the mind to read, write and figure, the present system is satisfactory. The imparting of technical knowledge for specialised professions is also, apart from minor improvements of method, comparatively successful; while there is much preoccupation, especially in schools of the 'higher' type, with training the mind to cultural ends in the belief that an intimacy with dead languages, a respect for ancient books, a catalogue of the world's past events, a grasp of higher mathematics and occasionally an admiration for traditional and obsolete forms of art will contribute to the adult's cultural status. On the grounds of sport, admitting its value in the development of physical fitness, education is safe within established rules, hence the fetish which games have become in at any rate the 'upper class' schools.

Two real aims, we may suspect, underlie these educational methods. Firstly, the development of the citizen in such a way

<sup>1</sup> Eva M. Hubback writing in *Adult Education* (pp. 55-56), September 1934.

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that he or she will be fitted to secure personal achievement in the world at large. Secondly, the bringing up of the potential citizen in such a manner that he or she will accept and revere without criticism all those political, social and economic beliefs which are to the advantage of the class that controls education. In no way whatsoever does our educational system today bring up the child to play an important part in social and political improvement except in an acceptance of things as they are without question. How the child, and in particular the working-class child, is expected to reconcile what it is taught in school with what it sees at home and in the world about it, is a point of interest.

More recently it has been recognised that there is need to prepare the child to become a good voter, a need that has somewhat unwillingly been forced upon educationalists by an era of political democracy. But far from providing the growing child with an elementary knowledge of the actual machinery of our political and social structures, indicating its origins and possible drawbacks, education has done all in its power to prevent any suspicion being aroused that the controlling system is anything but adequate, or that the world is conducted on any but the most successful lines. To do so would naturally lay open to criticism many of the principles upon which our modern society is built.

Thus instruction in politics, sociology, economics and the like, is relegated for the most part to meaningless generalisations, which in this way succeed in remaining non-controversial and harmless to the existence of the present system.

Is there, then, any wonder that the influencing of public opinion in Britain today is shared largely among the owners of the big national dailies, with their hirelings of professional sportsmen, advertisement writers, bigoted ecclesiastics and disappointed politicians; the entertainment-minded film producers; and a radio organisation which, whatever its faults, at least maintains a degree of responsibility more serious than the cinema or press? Neither of the latter is calculated to bring about a greater efficiency in the populace or inspire an urge for social advance so long as they are conducted on a private profit-making basis only; nor is it easy to believe that their exploiters have any intention to improve social conditions or build common aspirations while there remains money to be made from exploiting the uncultured sides of human nature.

In brief there exists today, on the one hand, an urgent need for

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the stimulation of wide interest among the public in matters of national and international significance and, on the other, a gradual ripening of social consciousness among a small but increasing minority. There is no question, however, that if the future development of civilisation is to proceed with any prospect of security and social progress, a great deal must be done to spread knowledge about the simple workings of government and the essential facts of our economic and social ways and means. For, as Mr James Harvey Robinson so admirably puts it: '... if certain seemingly indisputable historical facts were generally known and accepted and permitted to play a daily part in our thought, the world would forthwith become a very different place from what it is now. We could then neither delude ourselves in the simple-minded way we do now, nor could we take advantage of the primitive ignorance of others. All our discussions of social, industrial and political reform would be raised to a higher plane of insight and fruitfulness.'<sup>1</sup>

Now the third and fourth decades of this century have seen the universal rise of two new and immensely powerful instruments for the imparting of knowledge. Radio and cinema, jointly or separately, represent the biggest revolution in instructional methods since the introduction of the printing-press. Both have been available to such purpose during a sufficient period of years for some specific use to have been made of their resources. So our next point of enquiry might well be to investigate in what manner and to what extent the film, with which we are here primarily concerned, has been used to meet the requirements of social service.

### (ii) *Economic Basis and Commercial Development*

Before speculation as to its influences and possibilities, before probing its values and scope, before tracing its growth and use, it is essential that we should first emphasise cinema's fundamental dependence on mechanical apparatus.

Film, in its original mute form, depends for existence on the scientific constitution of sensitised emulsion and the mechanical functions of camera, processing and projection. The act of representation is wholly mechanical. For this reason, whatever its

<sup>1</sup> *The Mind in the Making*, James Harvey Robinson (Cape, 1921).

claims to artistic or instructional virtues, the film must always be primarily regarded as a problem in economics. Not only has this meant that its development must have been controlled by the laws of production and distribution, but its subjects and to some extent its styles have necessarily been influenced, if not dictated, by commercial speculation.

It is a matter of common observation that cinema has been developed as an industry on lines similar to those obtaining in any other branch of modern manufacture. That is to say, its guiding factor has been production for private profit. Description of its growth as a universal provider of public entertainment by the shrewd minds of its pioneer exploiters has been attempted elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> Let it suffice to repeat that during the last thirty-five years the manufacture and selling of films have more and more been conducted along the lines of prevailing methods of big business, with the financial reins held tighter and tighter by large-scale capitalists. The fact that it supplies amusement on a wide basis, coupled with its mechanical ability for repeated performances at little extra cost beyond the original outlay on production, has naturally meant that all the paraphernalia of mass-production—departmental systems and scientific costing—has been introduced in an attempt to make cinema today conform with other large-scale manufacturing processes, such as those concerned with motor-cars or canned goods.<sup>2</sup> Because it offers the opportunity for making profit on a big scale, film production proceeds on an economic policy of quick receipts in a short period of time. Only such rapid methods of trading can possibly justify its claims to extravagance, its battalions of highly-paid executives, and its middlemen and retailers who live by handling and exhibiting the product, and at the same time fulfil the hopes of its moneyed investors. Such methods, outrageous in any other age but our own, have inevitably led to inflated wages, often far in excess of the exchange value of the actual work performed, and to the fabric of ballyhoo maintained to keep the public 'film conscious'. As a cultural result, film stars have become the mythology of the twentieth century; film factories the modern Parnassus.

<sup>1</sup> Vide Gilbert Seldes's *The Movies and the Talkies* (Lippincott, 1931), and this author's *The Film Till Now* (Vision Press, 1949).

<sup>2</sup> This ambition to organise and control production to the highest degree and curtail creative freedom to the minimum was perfected in Mr J. Arthur Rank's Independent Frame Method, which, after costing immense sums of money, now seems to be abandoned.

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Cinema as an industry gives entertainment to the people. In its natural search after maximum receipts, the Trade is of the logical opinion that its films should appeal to the supposed largest proportion in any cinema audience, and hence that their intellectual value should coincide with the common factor of public thought. Believing this to be the most effective method by which the greatest number of pockets and purses may be reached, adequately supported by publicity and concessions to public ease and comfort, the major portion of the Industry's time and money has been spent in perfecting the manufacture and sale of one branch of cinema—the illustrated story derived from theatrical and literary tradition. So far has this field been exploited, so accurately has public taste been measured, that even stories in turn have been reduced to a limited set, each with its 'appeal' formula analysed and tabulated. No matter our views, we must admit that cinema has been developed by shrewd minds from what once appeared to be a toy to become one of the giant industries of the world, with its products displayed in almost every town, village and country in at least four out of the five continents.

So omnipresent, in fact, has the film become that it must be regarded as one of the most influential factors in the guidance of public thought, for there is scarcely a sphere of social life today in which its influence is absent. In the course of his valuable collection of data regarding the influence of films on child minds, for example, Mr Blumer makes the following pertinent remarks:

'Some young men and women, because of their attitudes and background of experience, regard the life of modern youth as it is shown in motion pictures, not only as an "ideal" type of life but as the proper type of life. From such pictures they are likely to derive ideas of freedom, of relations to parents, and of conduct towards one's associates. In this way motion pictures give *sanction* to codes of conduct and serve as an instrument for introducing the individual into a new kind and area of life.' <sup>1</sup>

Whether we like it or not (and Mr St John Ervine does not) there is every possibility that the cinema wields as great if not greater power than the printed word. Certainly visual expression wedded to aural utterance, backed by countless performances, commands a wider and swifter urgency than the radio or the theatre. And when the extent of the social influence that is at the

<sup>1</sup> *Movies and Conduct*, Herbert Blumer (Macmillan, 1933).

command of the film controllers is fully realised, we can at once appreciate how important becomes their place in framing the public's cultural outlook in present and future decades. In this country alone, you may recall, over eighteen million people go to the cinema every week and in one year the film-going public pays over £40,000,000 to the cinemas.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, while fully acknowledging that this great industrial machine of cinema is one of the outstanding features of our age, while admitting its valuable functions as a means of recreation and amusement, at the same time we have yet to discover precisely what social use has been made of its vast powers.

It is not my intention here to add to the already numerous attacks which have recently been made on cinema as an 'evil influence'. That has been adequately investigated and published in the series 'Motion Pictures and Youth' by the American Motion Picture Research Council. I would simply say that in their pursuit of profit, the manufacturers of the entertainment film have, perhaps unwisely, confined most of their efforts to exploiting some of the worst sides and cheapest aims of modern society. There are, of course, exceptions. Yet taken as a whole, not only does the story-film today spend its time in reflecting the least important aspects of a capitalist society but it is often made to do so in a cynical or unintelligent fashion. There are certain features of the present system which are of direct benefit to general social advance but they are seldom seen reflected in the current story-film. Far from suggesting better aspirations and higher standards of thought, the amusement film pursues a course which is often harmful to social interests; a fact that has not passed unnoticed by the upholders of the present social system themselves, as witnessed by the remarkable manifestation of the American Legion of Decency. The star-system, for example, one of the cinema's most anti-social processes, admirably illustrates the methods employed not only to deaden the audience to reality, and to prevent it from relating anything seen on the screen to the actualities of modern life, but to encourage deliberately the worship of the ego.

Perhaps it is true that the minds which order the policies of film production and distribution are unaware of their social

<sup>1</sup> Mr Simon Rowson before the Economic Science Section of the British Association, September 1934. United Kingdom figures for 1949 are weekly attendance, 30 millions; total gross revenue paid at the box-office, £108 million

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responsibilities. Perhaps, so long as the Industry continues on a satisfactory paying basis, they are not seriously concerned with the effect of their product on the audiences of the world. It is the more generous attitude for us to adopt. But at the same time we must not forget that it is to the advantage of a dominant class to produce and perfect a form of indirect propaganda for the preservation of its interests. All institutions, whether political, sociological or aesthetic, fundamentally reflect and assist in the maintenance of the predominating interests in control of the productive forces of their particular era. To this the cinema is no exception.

Hence it is clear that, under present policies of production, we cannot expect any film to deal impartially with such vital subjects of contemporary interest as unemployment, the problem of the machine, slum clearance, the relation of the white man to the native, or the manufacture of armaments. To do so would be to lay open to criticism some of the fundamental principles upon which modern society stands and for which the cinema, consciously or unconsciously, must act as a sort of deodorant.

For the same reason we can experience no surprise at the treatment of all working-class figures or coloured peoples, either as creatures of fun or as dishonest rogues, in current story-films, because it is to the ultimate interest of the dominant class that the spectator should regard them as such. You have only to observe the resentment of a working-class audience to the screen interpretation of one of themselves to realise my point.

The fact is that under the limits defined by the present economic system, entertainment cinema cannot possibly hope to deal either accurately or impartially from a sociological point of view with any of the really important subjects of modern existence. It is my contention, moreover, that whilst developed under the demands of financial speculation alone, cinema is unable to reach a point where its service to public interest amounts to anything more valuable than, as Mr Blumer has it, an emotional catharsis.

There is not a doubt, of course, that its temptations of substantial profit-making have definitely obscured cinema's larger but less glamorous purposes of social obligation. Indeed, we might most truthfully say that the film has never really been exploited on behalf of the public but primarily on behalf of private interests. Certainly, the Industry has yet to realise that the

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tremendous powers of the medium it controls are not without responsibility to aims other than that of mere private gain.

One fact emerges clear and salient from this discussion. If it is to fulfil our expectations as a power in the contemporary struggle for social advance, if it is to be instrumental in bringing about a greater public awareness for the urgent need of an economic and moral regeneration of the world, cinema must find an alternative economic basis for production to that of profit. To achieve this, it must be permitted to go outside the field at present exploited and be put to greater and more far-reaching uses than just amusement.

### (iii) *Propaganda*

From our earlier discussion of education and citizenship, it may have been gathered that illumination and propaganda are closely related. Propaganda, also, in a long-range sense, is very near to education and may be wisely interpreted as a task of development. In fact, so closely are the two interbound that in most cases it would be extremely difficult to define where instruction begins and propaganda ends. With this in mind, we may begin to suspect the interdependence of propaganda and instruction and to investigate their offer as a possible basis for film production.

In the same way that the nineteenth century saw the development of machinery for large-scale production of industry, so the last thirty years have seen the perfection of machinery to advertise the products of modern industry. The increased power of propaganda weapons since the War provides one of the most striking features of modern civilisation, but it is only recently that advantage has been taken of these formidable instruments by parties other than those concerned with industrial enterprise.

The First World War undoubtedly began this era of mass-persuasion, but the rapid development of the radio and the cinema, as well as the increasing influence exerted by the press, has subsequently trebled the importance of this new factor in the social structure. There can be little question that the immense persuasive properties of the two electric mediums—cinema and radio—have played an incalculable part in the shaping of mass-thought in post-war Europe. It is being generally recognised,

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moreover, that propaganda may become, as indeed in some countries it already is, one of the most important instruments for the building of the State. It is surely only a matter of time before the State will make full and acknowledged use of education, radio, cinema, pulpit and press to ensure public reception of its policies. Russia, Italy and Germany have already taken this course by their adoption of their particular system of government.

You cannot help but observe the organisation in Russia of all channels of expression to serve one prescribed propagandist end. Even more remarkable, perhaps, is the result of the astonishing propaganda drives organised in Germany by Goebbels, to whose understanding of the use of modern publicity mediums combined with his abilities for showmanship must be attributed some of the present popularity of the Nazi ideal; while the Italian methods of indirect State control over press, radio and film, exemplify the tremendous significance which the new authoritarian States place upon the instruments of propaganda. Schools, universities, cinema, radio—every conceivable agent of propaganda—are pressed into the service of the State to project its perfection.

With the exception of radio in Britain, however, the propaganda instruments in America and this country have been permitted to develop for the most part under the control of private enterprise. Only indirectly have they reflected the ideology of the system for which their users stand. But it is surely inevitable that, sooner or later, some fixed authoritative control will be exercised and it will be strange if it is not that of the State.

Now it is very obvious that, by reason of virtues inherent in its form, cinema is one of the most powerful channels of expression for persuasion and public illumination. Its peculiar suitabilities as an instrument of propaganda are almost too patent to specify. In brief, it possesses:

- (1) An introduction to the public shared only by the radio, with a resultant power of mass suggestion.
- (2) Simple powers of explanation and capacities for making statements which, if presented with a craftsmanship that takes full advantage of artistic values, are capable of persuasive qualities without equal, and
- (3) Virtues of mechanised repeated performance to a million persons, not once but countless times a day, tomorrow and, if the quality is good enough, ten years hence.

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By adopting propaganda as an alternative basis of production, not only might cinema serve the greatest possible purpose as a medium of almost unlimited potentialities and its films play an important part in the life of the State and its people, but production might enter into a freedom impossible to the entertainment film.

It is not unreasonable to suppose, then, that there is likely to be wide use made of the cinema in this country for the influencing of public opinion towards an acceptance of political beliefs; wider and more intelligent use than that is, than the amateurish efforts already made in this direction by the Conservative Party. But propaganda of this nature, of necessity dealing with controversial subjects, will demand production licence which will only be available where production takes place under Government or political party control and will be obviously outside the scope of general Trade activity. In this connection we may note that the documentary propaganda film, with which we are later to deal in full, had its origin in Britain in a Government department and that the majority of significant experiments in documentary have so far come from a film unit organised under Parliamentary control.

Besides political propaganda, moreover, there are many aspects of national affairs and public relations which may call for national publicities through the medium of the film, in an attempt to build up mutual sympathy and understanding between the people and the work of the public services. That has already been attempted with considerable success and enterprise by the Post Office, a departure in publicity methods which has not escaped criticism by the Government itself, as well as by the Trade and the individual.<sup>1</sup> And it is especially this type of film that demonstrates the close relations existing between propaganda and instruction for the awakening of civic consciousness among the public. Such activity, however, can mark only the beginning of the use of the film by the State and its political parties. There are a score of national services and departments that may ultimately take advantage of the possibilities of such far-reaching methods of propaganda.

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Report from Select Committee on Estimates* (H.M. Stationery Office, 1934), Section 'Government Cinematograph Films'. Note the attitude of the Chairman towards the aims of public relationships as well as the tone of the evidence given by the Trade. Vide also an editorial in *The Listener*, 31 October, 1934, and its criticism of Post Office films.

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Apart from State production, many subjects of a less controversial kind await 'bringing to life' on the screen; less controversial, that is, so long as the director who handles the films in question is socially and politically in sympathy with the forces controlling production. Most branches of Industry—coal, steel, textiles, engineering, architecture, shipping and the rest—and most public services—water, electricity, gas, traffic, etc.—are ripe for film treatment. Civics presents a wide field for experiment. Religion, also, can provide interesting themes for propagandist projection. Travel Associations, Welfare Organisations, Health Bodies, Educational Groups, Trade Unions, Workers' Clubs, Co-operative Societies, Youth Organisations and many other official and semi-official bodies again provide extensions to what we might perhaps call the non-entertainment field, each with its own propagandas to express and each requiring special treatment.

But since the production of such films as these falls outside the scope of any film unit organised by the Government, the question arises as to whether the Trade is sufficiently interested or, for that matter, really qualified to undertake production.

As we have seen earlier, the Trade has primarily been concerned with the development of the story-film and has exhibited but little real interest in other branches of the medium. There are occasional and notable exceptions, such as the Fox *Magic Carpet* series, Andrew Buchanan's *Cinemagazine* and the *Secrets of Nature* items, but even these are made with one eye on the accepted definition of box-office. In the field of directly commissioned propaganda films, also, the Trade has not until recently displayed any particular enthusiasm. Regrettably enough, where such films have been made, especially of the industrial type, they have most often been regarded by the Trade more as an easy means of making profit than as an opportunity to develop a new branch of cinema. For some years industrial firms have commissioned films to be made on the disgraceful basis of so-much-per-foot, cut-to-measure without skill or thought, with the lamentable result that today, and I speak with experience, many leading industrialists look upon the film as still a magnificent medium of publicity, but upon its exponents as so many tricksters. With the gradual appearance of better quality pictures along documentary lines, mostly brought into being without Trade assistance, this attitude on the part of the industrialist is

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slowly disappearing, but the Trade as a whole has still a great deal to learn before it will succeed in re-enlisting the full confidence of the big industries in this country.

There is, in fact, an increasing tendency for industrial and other firms, as well as semi-official bodies as those mentioned above, to enter into film production themselves, often in some sort of alliance with an existing Trade organisation but upon such a basis that supervision is vested in their own hands. In such cases, it is remarkable the degree of understanding of film matters which has been displayed by non-Trade minds. In fact, it might also be said that within recent years the industrialists, including shipping companies and the like, have been greatly responsible for developing the quality as well as making possible the production of many cultural and documentary films. *The Voice of the World, Contact, Shipyard* and *Sea Change* are examples. They have been quick to realise that they might be better served by the employment of individual film makers or collective units rather than by the allocation of their films to commercial companies; and it must be said on their behalf that considerable discretion has been exercised in the selection of the film makers into whose hands the product has been entrusted. For, as opposed to the making of story-films, the production of successful propaganda and documentary films is wholly a matter of the capabilities of the individual producer, a point which will emerge very clearly as our survey proceeds.

Assuming that the production of such films is possible, what place, if any, are they to occupy in the public film programme? With few exceptions it would seem that the film renter is in no way inclined to distribute non-story films except as pendants to his feature pictures. He is incapable of realising that salesmanship of such films differs in every possible way from the salesmanship of sex. With the complexities of the latter he is fully acquainted, but the more responsible purposes of cinema evoke a mistrust born of fear. The exhibitor presents a similar case. Despite the obvious demand for films dealing with contemporary matters, despite the increasing interest of the public in national and international affairs, evidenced both by the success already attending such films and by the experiments in book publishing and radio talks, the exhibitor still thinks in terms of story-pictures and remains deaf to the widespread criticism so frequently made of the supporting part of his programmes.

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Where non-story films of a high quality have so far succeeded in making their appearance in the cinemas, most often they have been thrown in as make-weights, sometimes in an abridged form. In consideration of such circumstances, it is amazing what progress has been made and what wide attention has been evoked among the public and the press by these films. In some cases they have been more popular and received greater publicity than the expensive main-feature picture which they were meant to support. *B.B.C.: The Voice of Britain* is an example. Two factors could undoubtedly aid the exhibition of these pictures in the immediate future. Firstly, the spread of the news-theatre and interest-theatre movement; secondly, the possibility of an adoption of the single-feature programme in large cinemas, necessitating a demand for first-class short films. Even then, this sort of half-hearted distribution is of no permanent value. Sooner or later someone has got to undertake the proper exploitation of non-fictional short pictures, sell them on their own merits, and once and for all destroy this absurd idea that short films are merely fill-ups.<sup>1</sup> But, assuming this properly organised distribution of seriously made non-fiction films, what is likely to be the public's response?

The human race, it is true, displays an amazing aptitude for accepting the most familiar things of daily life. Yet if someone sits on a flagpole for three days, or if the Atlantic is flown by a deaf mute in half a day, whole nations present an appetite for the details as to how and why the feat was accomplished, while the firm that made the boots, or supplied the red-flannel stomacher which assisted the hero in his task, makes huge profits from the advertisement. But the marvellous organisations that make our daily lives a possibility, that bring food to our tables, telephones for rapid communication, mechanically reproduced music to entertain us, methods of transport to carry us, newspapers to inform us, heat to warm us and light for us to see by, as well as the multitude of services that conduct our days and nights, all these are accepted under our present social conditions without question until such a moment when we are reminded of them by their sudden absence. Such an attitude, of course, may again be traced to the inadequacy of our educational system.

But it is gratifying to find that where the cinema has explored

<sup>1</sup> Documentary distribution today (1951) in the public cinemas is just as restricted as 15 years ago. Cf. pp. 221, 237, 238.

this field, particularly in the 'bringing to life' of the public services, such as the late E.M.B. and the present G.P.O. films attempt, public interest is forthcoming. Far from resenting the instructional element, there is overwhelming evidence of the audience's interest in such, although it is still a hard task to persuade the cinema exhibitor or renter of its existence. Nevertheless, despite their present restricted field of theatre exhibition, films of the working of the telephone system or of the running of the far-flung air-routes have attracted considerable attention and have begun to build up an audience more stable than that accumulated by the story-film.

So far we have dealt only with the adult theatre audience. But documentary is going much further than the four thousand odd theatres in Britain. It is going to find an ever-broadening field in the non-theatrical market. The hundreds, soon to be thousands, of portable projectors, both standard and sub-standard, will rely to a great extent upon the non-fiction film for their programmes. At present we are at the stage where clubs, associations, societies, guilds, unions, institutes, universities, schools and lecture groups, to say nothing of industrial firms and Government departments, are thinking of purchasing projection equipment. There is also the projector for private use, just as there is the radio and the gramophone. Here again the non-story film will find fresh demands, for not all people will show in their homes the kind of story-film that they see in the public cinemas, even if such are available for hire to them.

It is this huge non-theatrical field of portable standard and sub-standard projectors that naturally holds the greatest interest for the propagandist, this potential audience of school children and students. This is where persuasions are most likely to be persuasive, where response is most likely to be forthcoming. Thus we find big industrialists today launching great campaigns of publicity films (Morris, Ford, Cadbury, Daimler, the Electrical Development Association are examples), some well made, some extremely bad; and, in wise cases, setting up their own films units as with the British Commercial Gas Association. Thus we find political parties despatching fleets of projection-vans up and down the country, as well as establishing special propaganda committees with programmes in which films are announced to play a large part. Thus we find bodies such as the Travel and Industrial Development Association possessing their own film

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units, and educational bodies such as the National Union of Teachers commissioning films to be made. Thus, more and more, do we find evidence of the film playing a prominent part in national life, in a sphere quite different from that of the ordinary entertainment film.

Certainly we may accept the fact that, in the course of time, projector groups will spring up all over the country, not only sponsored by propaganda groups for their particular ends, but organised among the public itself in the shape of film guilds and societies. At present the Trade exhibitor and renter (with rare exceptions) is inclined to ignore the presence of the film society movement. The theatre queues are still sufficiently large to obscure a long-range vision. They are perhaps unwise. Public interest in the cinema is increasing with remarkable speed. Moreover, such interest is not wholly or even minutely inspired by what the Trade would call 'highbrow' intentions. The film society movement (I speak with some experience) in the provinces of Britain is largely composed of ordinary persons drawn from every class and occupation. They are not all concerned with discovering the mythical 'art' of the film. They are not all what the Conservative newspapers would call 'Red hooligans'. They are working people of every description who have quietly permitted the exhibitor to look after his own queues and set out to do something for themselves about the kind of films they want to see. Not only are they gathering together to hold performances but they are slowly exercising an ever-widening influence on opinion generally. And this movement is not confined to Britain alone; it has spread to South Africa, New Zealand, Canada, Australia, America, and elsewhere.

The Trade is, of course, fully aware of the seriousness of this growth in the non-theatrical field and has probably considered various ways of checking its spread or, alternatively, of exploiting its progress. It might, for example, prohibit the hiring out of story-films except to theatres until such a time as the films should have lost interest. It might encourage and even inspire official action on the grounds that the non-theatrical field offends censorship or offers risk of fire. It might suggest that the growth of non-theatrical projector groups would encourage propagandas which were seditious. But by so doing it would only complicate its own position, because already several large Trade organisations have embarked on ambitious plans for the exploitation of

this very field both from an instructional and entertainment point of view.

Within its limits, therefore, propaganda appears to present an alternative to the hard cash basis for film production. On some sides, it will doubtless be maintained that propaganda is a sterner end to serve than profit, that the demands of the propagandist will restrict even further the development of the film and the activity of its makers. I can hear it being said that the introduction of propaganda will once and for all destroy the claims of cinema to artistic virtue. I, also, once held that opinion.

#### (iv) *Film as an Art*

Culture, sociologists inform us, is derived from the economic status of society. In the most primitive stages of civilisation the growth of culture springs from an expression of popular consciousness, necessitating the spending of energy on things other than the essentials of existence. As, however, the general wealth of society grows larger, so apparently does the acquisition of culture become more the exclusive right of the wealthy class. Hence, we find art departing more and more from its original function of providing objects useful to the community at large, and becoming a luxury relying on the patronage of the wealthy minority. Not until the general standard of living rises is the population, as a whole, again able to indulge in its desire for culture and do the arts again become popular. They do not, however, return to a reflection of popular expression but continue to portray tastes inspired by a superior economic position and create standards dictated by class snobbery. Thus the great mass of people today has been taught to regard a taste in the arts as an end in itself, bearing no relation to the ordinary things of everyday living, but the result of a cultural ideal set by the leisure tastes of the superior class.

Although all true artists create their most significant work by seeking inspiration in the common life of the people, they have rarely associated themselves with the community. They have sought and found elsewhere more fruitful acquaintance with wealthy patrons and bodies representative of the predominant system, although such an association has often meant a cap-in-hand approach. As civilisation has developed, so artists have

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departed more and more from their status as humble craftsmen serving the needs of mankind by making objects for practical purpose, and have tended to become romantic idealists, creating works of art primarily for contemplation, satisfying only personal ambitions under the publicity blurb that they are seeking some mystical goal which they describe in high-falutin' theory.

In this way the practice of the arts has become a matter of personal activity, detached from all social life, admirably suiting the cultural ideals set up by bourgeois aestheticism. The artist has become a man apart from other men, a human being with privileges denied the common mob, expressing and satisfying the whims of a small cultivated portion of society. Painting has become a trough of symbolism and all-in wrestling with the subconscious mind unintelligible to the majority. Poetry has become a private experience far removed from most reasonable understanding. A great deal of literature is concerned purely with the personal struggles and experiences of unimportant individuals, seeking satisfaction in an imaginary world devoid of human relationships on a significant scale. And where cinema has pretended to be an art in itself, with no other ends than its aesthetic virtues, it has slobbered and expired in a sepulchre of symbolism or, still worse, mysticism. You may recall, perhaps, that the films of the so-called German 'golden period' were enshrouded in deep mysticism and a revival of folk-superstition, borrowing from the expressionist theatre and cubist painting (*Caligari*, *Golem*, *Destiny* and *The Street*). It was not until such men as Pabst brought in the fresh air of social consciousness that the cobweb atmosphere of mystical mumbo-jumbo disappeared in a sink of mental and, incidentally, commercial bankruptcy. The same criticism may be applied to the arabesques of the French *avant-garde* group, the 'art' films of Russia and the occasional tit-bits that have come from America, like *Lot in Sodom*.

Art, like religion or morals, cannot be considered apart from the materialist orderings of society. Hence it is surely fatal for an artist to attempt to divorce himself from the community and retire into a private world where he can create merely for his own pleasure or for that of a limited minority. He is, after all, as much a member of the common herd as a riveter or a glass-blower, and of necessity must recognise his obligations to the community into which he is born. His peculiar powers of creation must be used to greater purpose than mere personal satisfaction.

## FILM AS AN ART

By its very abstraction, individualistic thought is sterile. Art is not a gift from some miraculous paradise but a contribution to a definite period of history. It has a marked purpose to serve at its time of origin, after which it becomes of sentimental value to be studied historically and as an example of skill. Great art is undying simply because its human interests appear to be of permanent value. Shakespeare, Leonardo, Holbein, Swift, Chaucer, Stendhal—each represents the intellectual developments of a particular ordering of society based on the productive relations of that society. Their styles, philosophies, and intellectual significances have root only in the social and economic conditions of their particular epoch. To us, today, certain of their work appears to live simply because each possessed an understanding of human values which is significant for every stage of society. But this expression of human understanding would never have become manifest if a special purpose had not been served at the same time. Their greatness is an offshoot, an overtone, of a task well done. These great works of art of the past would not have come into being only as a result of mere private speculation.

But in nearly all the fine arts today we find a purely individualistic aim, a cultivation of aesthetic feelings divorced from social means and ends. It is, perhaps, an inevitable condition in a civilisation that may be on the verge of a great social and economic change. It is the ultimate outcome of the refusal to face the changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution, when artists fled to ivory castles of lofty idyllism and covered their faces before the onslaught of the machine and the smoke clouds of coal, coming forth only to salve the consciences of big business men by creating useless monstrosities from the profits of early industrial enterprise.

Today, all that social and economic background is changed. But the artist, with the exception of a few writers and architects, still refuses to accept his real position in society, preferring instead to keep up this pretence of evasion. Hence, such survivals as the Royal Academy. Hence, the existence of these pretentious modern art groups. Your art-for-art's-saker, and there are plenty of them, will exclaim that the true artist is deserting art if you suggest that it should serve a definite purpose in the social sphere. It will be said that an artist is too strong spiritually to be socially conscious. In his mystic coma, your average intellectual is unable to see that this tendency towards social awareness arises purely

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from a cultural need, a long overdue liquidation of the old conception of art as an aesthetic ideal noble in its isolation. He will express horror at the thought of art being a social function, an approach to things other than from an artistic basis, a work which must be of practical purpose and not a mere mouthpiece of personal taste. And, if that attitude is still maintained, there is obviously no place for the artist in cinema.

There are, of course, still some people who speak of cinema as an art. Yet the most cursory study of modern production methods in the studio, the briefest analysis of entertainment film economics, must quickly indicate that the time when personal expression as opposed to mere technical style could find outlet, when the artist who had something to create could rise to a position where his work of art could be projected before a mass-audience, has passed away for good, if indeed it ever existed. Dictates of modern commerce, uttered by the financial controllers of the Industry, completely submerge the efforts of the individual (unless he become a harnessed Lubitsch or a despondent Clair) with the result that the story-film is nothing more or less than the mechanised product of factory workers. And while cinema is made to express the unimportant subjects it does, reflect the ideology of a hypocritical society, and continue to be divorced from the realities of this world in which it is made, its lack of artistic pretensions does not really matter.

The film, like all other forms of expression, is the outcome of social relationships that are conditioned by the material demands of existence. If it is to mean anything, if it is to survive, a film must serve a purpose beyond itself. That this purpose may be served honestly and competently, good craftsmanship is essential. The mistake of most cinematic method in the past has been the pursuit of craftsmanship for its own sake, for which the artist is not wholly to blame. We have seen, for instance, that the mechanical basis of the medium has meant development along accepted economic lines, thus, automatically, depriving the artist of his choice of theme. Secondly, in all but a few cases, the wealth of interesting technical experiment in this very young process has been sufficient to occupy the mind of the technician. Hence we find that in cinema's line-up there are many excellent examples of brilliant craftsmanship but scarcely any films which are outstanding for the contribution they make to modern society.

The big films of cinema, few as they are, have all served a special purpose and have not come into being primarily as the result of mere artistic endeavour or the desire to make profit. They are significant because of the sincerity of their creators in the part they were intended to play in social and political enlightenment. *Kameradschaft* and *Potemkin* are the two favourite examples. They were both propagandist.

Without this aim of special service, I cannot see that cinema has any real significance beyond that of providing a temporary emotional refuge for the community, making profit or loss for its moneyed speculators and preserving a record for future historical reference which will give a partly erroneous picture of our age.

It is not as if the materials of cinema were inexpensive. On the contrary, in comparison with the humble requirements of the painter, poet or sculptor, the materials of camera, microphone, stock and other equipment are fabulous in price. Thus, for very obvious reasons, your individual artist cannot even begin to make his way in cinema without first establishing a firm economic basis.

At the same time, it is absurd to suggest that cinema, with its powers to enlarge the public's social conscience, to create new standards of culture, to stir mental apathies, to build new understandings and, by virtues inherent in its form, to become the most powerful of all modern preachers—it is absurd to suggest that it can be left in the hands of commercial speculators to be used as a vehicle for purposeless fictional stories. There must be a world outside that represented by the entertainment film. There must be sources of production other than those demanding only profit. There must be kinds of cinema and ends to serve other than those which portray an artificial world conceived under mass-production methods at the dictates of the balance-sheet. There is—the world of propaganda and education.

Real and creative thought must be about real things. Let cinema explore outside the limits of what we are told constitutes entertainment. Let cinema attempt the dramatisation of the living scene and the living theme, springing from the living present instead of from the synthetic fabrication of the studio. Let cinema attempt film interpretations of modern problems and events, of things as they really are today, and by so doing perform a definite function. Let cinema recognise the existence of real men and women, real things and real issues, and by so doing

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offer to State, Industry, Commerce, to public and private organisations of all kinds, a method of communication and propaganda to project not just personal opinions but arguments for a world of common interests.

### (v) *Documentary*

There is, then, every reason to believe that there lies ahead of cinema a tremendous field quite separate from that already developed along the lines of the story-film. New means of production, made possible by propaganda and instruction, open up new avenues of experiment. New methods of distribution and exhibition suggest new publics. New demands from education and publicity indicate new forms of film and new attitudes towards the materials of cinema.

This does not imply that the story-film as such has no place in cinema; that amusement, recreation, entertainment, call it what you will, is not an essential thing to the ordinary person; nor that cinema has not performed a vast function in making the theatre available to the masses by pursuing the line of photographed stage-plays. But it does most emphatically suggest that the story-film is not the be-all and end-all of cinema; that other kinds of film are as important, if not more important, in the long run than the fiction product of the commercial studios. The amusement film has a valuable place to fill in modern society but its function is not to deaden the social and civic conscience of the audience. The good story-film, especially in the field of comedy and satire and occasionally, very occasionally, in the lighter realms of fantasy, is as indispensable as the good novel or the good play. It is only when, for reasons of private gain and self-interest, it assumes the proportions of a menace, when it threatens to stifle all other methods of cinema, when it tends to become an anaesthetic instead of a stimulant that the story-film becomes dangerous.

But the cinema has at last become alive outside the limits of the studio balance sheet. It has found temporary salvation in serving the ends of education and persuasion. It has found fresh air beyond the sound-and-idea-proof studios in what Grierson has called the 'creative treatment of actuality'. And among these new forms, somewhat beyond the simple descriptive terms of the

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teaching film, more imaginative and expressive than the specific publicity picture, deeper in meaning and more skilful in style than the news-reel, wider in observation than the travel picture or lecture film, more profound in implication and reference than the plain 'interest' picture, there lies Documentary. And the documentary method may well be described as the birth of creative cinema.



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## II

# THE EVOLUTION OF DOCUMENTARY

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## II

### THE EVOLUTION OF DOCUMENTARY

What we have come to call 'documentary' did not appear as a distinctive method of film-making at any given moment in the cinema's history. It did not suddenly become manifest as a new conception of film in any particular production. Rather has documentary evolved over a period of time for materialist reasons; partly as the result of amateur effort, partly through serving propagandist ends, partly through aestheticism.

We have already observed that the major portion of the Industry's time has been spent in perfecting the production and sale of one kind of film—the illustrated story made largely in the studio. Relatively little thought has been given to the potentialities of other methods of cinema (except in such rare cases as the advent of a Disney and, even then, we may recall Disney's struggle before he gained commercial success), or to the possibility that the mass audience might be comprised of many different kinds of persons with a variety of outlooks.

As a direct consequence, the machinery of the film factories and the elaborate, sometimes efficient, system of salesmanship have been developed to deal with one type of film and only one. It might be extremely difficult for a film of a different type, should the public make apparent its desire for such, to receive adequate treatment from the Trade. Thus it is in no way surprising that when, on various occasions, new kinds of films have appeared, the Trade has not always been able to give them capable handling even though they may have possessed money-making possibilities.

For this reason, although they have frequently made their appearance, pictures dealing with natural subjects have seldom received the vigorous support of the Trade, nor has any really serious attention been paid to short pictures of an 'interest' type for their own sake. Short films have been regarded much as the proverbial gift with a packet of tea, as fill-ups and make-weights, often given away in handfuls with a major story-film. They are

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often issued in a disgraceful state of abbreviation. The copies are frequently mutilated or in a bad condition. They are seldom given the dignity of a press presentation. Not only this, but there are even cases when exhibitors, desiring to book certain short pictures, have found it almost impossible to do so. Most of the initiative for travel films has come from persons outside the Trade. It has resulted from individual amateur effort. There is no exaggeration in saying that two-thirds of the attempts to employ cinema for purposes other than fictional story-telling have come about from sources quite apart from the Film Trade.

Nevertheless, from quite an early date in cinema, such films have found their way into production. In face of the indifference of producing companies and renting concerns, the desire to use the film camera for wider aims than story-telling has increased, and since the First World War there has been a steady growth in public enthusiasm for them.<sup>1</sup> The fact that the film camera and cinema screen have it in their power to show one half of the world how the other half lives has given birth to numerous simply-made travel pictures—such as the current FitzPatrick *Traveltalks* and the Fox *Magic Carpet* series—yet, until today, there has been little attempt to classify and analyse their respective virtues. But it was clear from these humble efforts that the film had every possibility of expressing something beyond fictional stories conceived and put on the screen by departmental methods.

By virtue of the camera's ability to record a reasonably faithful image, pictorial description was—and still is—the primary intention of these *documentaires*, as the French called them. Their real appeal lay in the obvious attraction of scenic material gathered from all parts of the world, interpreted by the academic skill of their photographers. Although a decided advance on the magic-lantern lecture, these *Voyage au Congo's* and *Everest's* and *Pamyr's* can hardly be said to add greatly to the film as a medium of creative power but at least they had the merit of exploring fresh territory.

The news-reel, of course, was also making use of the camera's reproductive capacities by building up an ever-changing panorama of daily events; not with much skill it must be confessed, for its value lay in speed, hazard and impudence. Never-

<sup>1</sup> The remarks of Captain F. S. Smythe regarding Film Trade methods in his book *Kamet Conquered* (Gollancz, 1933), are significant.

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theless, its basic appeal again rested in presenting actual events in their actual surroundings. It was a method, albeit a crude one, of reporting.

Many other subjects crept into this growing field of non-story cinema, exploring the fascinating possibilities of the camera as fast as the necessary resources could be found. Cinemagazines of the Buchanan brand carried into celluloid the style and method of popular periodicals; sport was approached in personal interviews and skilful demonstrations of the underlying sciences, such as the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer series; microscopical cinematography investigated the phenomena of natural history and biology, notably in Percy Smith's<sup>1</sup> *Secrets of Nature* and in Jean Painlevé's beautiful fish films; events of World War I were made to live again with suitable injections of patriotism, as in Bruce Woolfe's *Zeebrugge* and *Battle of Falkland and Coronel Islands*; experiments in science and medicine were recorded for the benefit of posterity, as in Canti's cancer film: all humble efforts at utilising cinema for more ambitious purposes than mere story-telling.

But the limits to which these pictures reach are scarcely sufficient for us to regard them as anything more than recorded facts, with no further virtue than their frequent use of naturally existing material and subjects in preference to the artificial conceptions of the studios. They make no effort to approach their subjects from a creative or even dramatic point of view, no attempt to govern the selection of images by methods other than those of plain description, no endeavour to express an argument or fulfil a special purpose. Nor do they fully explore the range of the reproductive properties of the camera and microphone and only occasionally attempt simple editing for a lucid presentation of facts with commentary to match.

The step that exists between this type of general 'interest' picture and the higher aims of the documentary method is wider than is usually imagined. Because these 'interest', travel and lecture films often embrace no story and make use of natural material, it is believed that they fall within the documentary grouping. The fallacy of this belief will, I hope, gradually become apparent during our closer survey of the evolution of documentary.

Without entering into complex technical discussion, it is

<sup>1</sup> Died London, March 1944.

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nevertheless important to make clear, at this point, the fundamental distinctions that exist between the two methods of using the apparatus and materials of cinema.

One hundred years ago, the skill of a craftsman was the only means by which a pictorial record of a person, a place or an object could be secured for pleasure or reference. Today, that craftsmanship has been superseded by the science of photography.

From the first days of film production until the present, most story-film technique to have emanated from Western studios has been based on the fact that the camera could reproduce phenomena photographically on to sensitised celluloid; and that from the resultant negative a print could be taken and thrown in enlarged size by a projector on to a screen.

In consequence, we find that more consideration is accorded the actors, scenery and plot than the method by which they are given screen presence, a system of manufacture which admirably suits the departmental organisation of the modern film studio. Thus the product of the scenario, together with the accommodating movements of the camera and microphone, create numerous lengths of celluloid, which merely require trimming and joining in correct sequence, according to the original scenario, for the result to be something in the nature of a film. Occasionally, where words and sounds fail to give the required lapses of time and changes of scene, ingenious camera and sound devices are introduced. It is not, of course, quite so simple as this but, in essentials, the completed film is believed to assume life and breath and meaning by the transference of acting to the screen and words to the loudspeaker.

The skill of the artist, therefore, lies in the treatment of the story, guidance of the actors in speech and gesture, composition of the separate scenes within the picture-frame, movements of the cameras and the suitability of the settings; in all of which he is assisted by dialogue-writers, cameramen, art-directors, make-up experts, sound-recordists and the actors themselves, while the finished scenes are assembled in their right order by the editing department,

Within these limits, the story-film has *followed* closely in the theatrical tradition for its subject-matter; converting, as time went on, stage forms into film forms, stage acting into film acting, according to the exacting demands of the reproducing camera and microphone.

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The opposite group of thought, however, while accepting the same elementary functions of the camera, microphone and projector, proceeds from the belief that nothing photographed, or recorded on to celluloid, has meaning until it comes to the cutting-bench; that the primary task of film creation lies in the physical and mental stimuli which can be produced by the factor of editing. The way in which the camera is used, its many movements and angles of vision in relation to the objects being photographed, the speed with which it reproduces actions and the very appearance of persons and things before it, are governed by the manner in which the editing is fulfilled. This applies equally to sound. Such a method presupposes that one mind assumes responsibility for the shape and meaning of the completed film, performs the editing as well as, in some cases, the photographing; a procedure which obviously does not fit smoothly into mass-production methods.

Within these limits, departure has been made *away* from the theatrical tradition into the wider fields of actuality, where the spontaneity of natural behaviour has been recognised as a cinematic quality and sound is used creatively rather than reproductively. This attitude is, of course, the technical basis of the documentary film.

If dates will help, documentary may be said to have had its real beginnings with Flaherty's *Nanook* in America (1920), Dziga Vertov's experiments in Russia (round about 1923), Cavalcanti's *Rien que les heures* in France (1926), Ruttmann's *Berlin* in Germany (1927) and Grierson's *Drifters* in Britain (1929). Broadly speaking, documentary falls into four groups, each of which demands individual estimate because each results from a different approach to naturally existing material.

### (i) *The Naturalist (Romantic) Tradition*

That the use of natural scenery and everyday surroundings found a place in theatrical cinema in its earliest stages, that right up to the present day the natural exterior plays an important part in many story-films, is a matter of common observation. With very occasional exceptions, however, such realistic material has been employed only as a charming or, in some cases, spectacular background to the behaviour of the characters in a story

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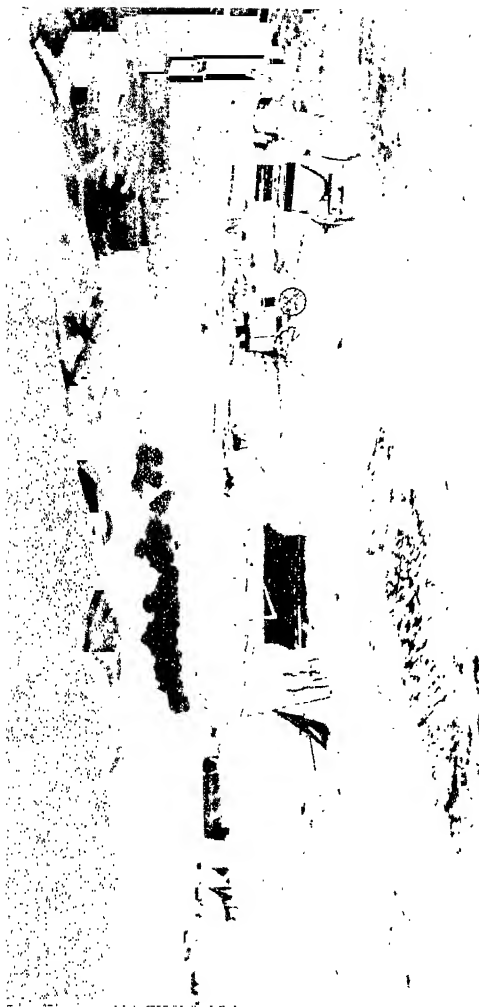
and is not considered of primary interest for its own sake. Little attempt has been made, for instance, to relate characters to natural surroundings. The story is seldom inherent in the environment. Fictional situations and their imaginary protagonists are superimposed on authentic backgrounds interspaced with studio sets. Dramatic crises do not arise from the natural characteristics of the surroundings, but from the personal inclinations and motives of the fictitious characters. Backgrounds, like subjects, are frequently chosen only for their topical interest.

To this general observation some of the earlier work of Griffith is an exception, not in his avoidance of relating story to surroundings but in his recognition of the value of the elements for emphasis of the emotional experiences of the characters. You will remember the snow and ice in *Way Down East* and the natural backgrounds in early Pickford films. Sjöström, also, pursued a similar idea and in one picture used the wind as an outward visual emphasis of an inner mental struggle with sensitive imagination. To the Swedes, in fact, must go the credit for the first real imaginative use of the exterior in fiction films, long before the Russians or the Germans became aware of the virtues of the natural scene.

The most important use of authentic background in America was, of course, in the Western film, which for so many years provided popular enjoyment for the world at large and which still can be found in the native compounds of South African gold-mines. Even the up-to-date sophisticated Western often gives us the American film mind at its best. Yet still the selection of naturalistic material comes secondary to the exciting spectacle of gun-play and rodeos.

It is characteristic of the commercial cinema, however, that every now and again an 'epic' picture will emerge, because the epic theme has immediate and valuable audience appeal. Man fighting his way across unbounded horizons, Man battling against primitive Nature, is assured of acclaim no matter if the achievement is decked out with amorous interludes or villainous counterplots.

Thus, when *The Covered Wagon* went into production as an ordinary Western in 1924, and through some unique freak of fortune emerged as an epic of national endeavour, we find the American amusement film first making use of background for its own sake. This could not very well be avoided. The country, as



THE IRON HORSE (American 1924)  
Fox Film Corporation; *directed by* JOHN FORD



GIMARRON (American 1936)  
R.K.O. Radio Pictures: *directed by* WESLEY RUGGLES

## THE NATURALIST (ROMANTIC) TRADITION

well as the elements, was largely responsible for the conflict on which this theme of the great trek to the west was founded.

Admittedly, *The Covered Wagon* was in the story-film class, admittedly it was a reconstruction of past events, admittedly it included situations primarily believed to be of commercial value, but, at the same time, its theme of grand endeavour was to greater purpose than mere fiction, with a direct although traditional relationship to national issues.

That its producers were incapable of diagnosing the reason for its success is suggested by the imitations by which it was followed. Improvements on the original were attempted. The endeavours were made more dangerous, the achievements more heroic and further fictional interest was added, thus showing that the magnates completely failed to appreciate that *The Covered Wagon's* appeal lay in the essential simplicity of its epic theme. *The Big Trail* and *Fighting Caravans* are cases in point. *The Iron Horse* came nearer to success: another epic conception dealing with the giant task of throwing America's first railroad across the trackless wastes of the Continent against the obstacles of Nature and the hostility of the Indians; and we must remember also Karl Brown's film of Kentucky, *Stark Love*.

The naturalist tradition, however, was not confined to the Western scene. Travel and adventure made their obvious appeal to independent photographers, who brought back from their expeditions remarkable records of strange life in the outer world for the edification of the curious town-dweller.

Most of these suffered a similar fate at the hands of the exploiting side of the Trade—either to be issued as romantic travel pictures with commercial dressing (*Grass, Chang, Rango, Pori, Tembi*, etc.), or actually interwoven with fictional incidents staged in Hollywood's always accommodating back-garden (*The Four Feathers*). Occasionally, forearmed with a knowledge of the picture-business's unique ideas of salesmanship, stories were invented on the spot, with such ingenious results as Barkas's *Palaver* and Poirier's *Cain*. Only an inherent instinct for photography, and a mentality that could observe the essential drama of Man's struggle against Nature, saved Robert Flaherty<sup>1</sup> from joining the ranks of these wandering photographers.

During one of his expeditions for Sir William McKenzie of the C.N.R. into the Hudson Bay Territory and Baffin Land,

<sup>1</sup> Died Brattleborough, Vermont, July, 1951.

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Flaherty took with him a film camera. The results of his first efforts were destroyed by fire, but he paid a return visit in 1920 for Reveillon Frères, the furriers, to one of that company's trading posts at the mouth of the Inuksiuk River. There, with a walrus hunter as his main character, he settled down to make a film of the eskimos.

*Nanook* differed from previous and many later natural-material pictures in the simplicity of its statement of the primitive existence led by the eskimos, put on the screen with excellent photography (before the days of panchromatic emulsion) and with an imaginative understanding behind the use of the camera. It brought alive the fundamental issue of life in the sub-arctic—the struggle for food—with such imaginatively chosen shots and with such a sincere feeling for the community interests of these people, that it suggested far greater powers of observation than the plain description offered by other naturalistic photographers. Not merely did it reveal the daily struggle for life maintained by the eskimo people, but it demonstrated that the progress of civilisation depends upon Man's growing ability to make Nature serve a purpose, and by his own skill to bend natural resources to his own ends. The screen has probably no more simply treated, yet brilliantly instructive, sequence than that in which *Nanook* builds his igloo. In short, it established an entirely new approach to the living scene, forming the basis for a method of working which Flaherty has since developed.

The commercial success of *Nanook*<sup>1</sup> (it was issued by Pathé) took Flaherty to the film magnates and he was offered a contract by Paramount (then Famous-Players) to go to the South Seas and bring back 'another *Nanook*'. This was the extent to which the profit-seeking minds of commercialism could go with the naturalist conception.

In point of fact, of course, Flaherty was despatched to the South Seas in the belief that he would bring back a symphony of female nudity, such being the main asset of the native to the film producer. Instead, Flaherty returned with a sensitively composed idyll of the Samoans, a theme that showed how the native, in order to prove his manhood, created a ceremonial ritual of pain—the Tattoo.

<sup>1</sup> Thirty years after its production, a synchronised version of *Nanook* was playing top of the bill at one of London's biggest West-End cinemas, advertised in 20 ft. high neon letters. No greater tribute has ever been paid to Robert Flaherty.

## THE NATURALIST (ROMANTIC) TRADITION

If anything *Moana* (1926) was more carefully observed than *Nanook*. There was the beginning of those caressing camera movements, which were to find rich fulfilment in his later work, and that feeling for the poetry of natural things which is inborn in the true artist. Photographically, it was a revelation of the infinite latitude of panchromatic emulsion and was claimed to be the first full-length picture to be made on this stock.

More important, it demonstrated clearly Flaherty's personal methods of working:

'... it became an absolute principle that the story must be taken from the location, and that it should be (what he considers) the essential story of the location. His drama, therefore, is a drama of days and nights, of the round of the year's seasons, of the fundamental fights which give his people sustenance, or build up the dignity of the tribe.'<sup>1</sup>

In other words, the material for the theme must be observed at first-hand and absorbed into the mind before the film is actually started. This had scarcely been the case with any travel films preceding or contemporary with *Nanook* or *Moana*. And secondly, while the material used for the film is photographed from real life and is, in fact, recorded 'reality', by the selection of images, brought about by an intimate understanding of their presence, the film becomes an interpretation, a special dramatisation of reality and not mere recorded description.

*Moana* was sold to the public by pimp salesmen as the 'love-life of a South Sea syren', prologued by stripped chorus girls and jangling guitars. Driven to desperation by this vulgar treatment of a thing which had taken two years of solid hard work to create, Flaherty turned salesman, at which he is no mean hand, and put over *Moana* in the six toughest towns in the United States by the simple procedure of organising the lecture and educational bodies as his audience. The Film Trade was surprised, but no wiser. The documentary method was then, as indeed now, a closed book to the big magnate.

There followed a brief contretemps with the Metro-Goldwyn company about a return visit to the South Seas, resulting in Flaherty's blunt refusal to accept the imposition of stars and a Hollywood story and the willing surrender of the film to a director more facile with his conscience (*White Shadows*). For a similar reason, a film for Fox about the Red Indian Rain Dance in New

<sup>1</sup> Grierson, *Cinema Quarterly*, vol. i, no. 2.

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Mexico was abandoned after a preliminary investigation with a still-camera and, after some experimental colour work for Museum authorities in New York and a two-reeler of skyscraper symphonics (later used as a backcloth to dancing girls at the Roxy), Flaherty departed in company with the late F. W. Murnau, a German previously associated with studio films of the most formal type, once more for the South Seas.

There they made a romantic story of a youth who disobeys the tabu of his tribe and is pursued by the vengeance of the gods. *Tabu* had all the loveliness of its setting: canoes flashing in the sunlight and ceremonial dances by graceful maidens against a background of rolling seas and golden sands, but it was obvious that Flaherty's method of approach was at discord with Murnau's studio-trained mind. The film degenerated into a beautiful lyrical description of a distant legend of forgotten importance.

Presently Flaherty came to Europe. After playing awhile with the craftsmanship traditions of the Black Country at the invitation of the E.M.B. (*Industrial Britain*), he was commissioned by the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation to bury himself in one of the Aran Islands off the Irish coast and bring back a film.

Being the most recent example of the romantic school, *Man of Aran* gives us the idyllic documentary method at its most developed. In it Flaherty fulfils every wish which has prompted his idealist mind since the early days of *Nanook*. Nearly two years in production, he found on this rugged island a perfect location for the Flaherty method—a place where Man could be observed in all his primitive philosophy of living, epitomised by the eternal struggle against his enemy, the Sea. The conflict between Man and Nature has never before been so well staged, nor have the visual qualities of sea and wave been so well photographed. We see the islanders, or at least a handful of them, scraping precious scraps of soil from the rocky surfaces to make gardens for their crops. We see a shark hunt, thrillingly contrived, to provide oil for the cottage lamps. We see father, mother and son relentlessly pursuing the ancient struggle and are left suspended in the teeth of the storm as the battle goes on.

There are moments when the instinctive caressing of the camera over the natural movements of a boy fishing, or of men against the horizon, bring a flutter to your senses; so beautiful in feeling and so perfect in reproduction that their image may seem indelible. And again there are moments when you recollect your

## THE REALIST (CONTINENTAL) TRADITION

thoughts and wonder whether dawdling over a woman carrying wet seaweed across the beach, beautiful in itself to behold, is really important. It might be that two minds had disagreed, each seeking the major issue of the theme and each finding a different solution. The sharks for the box-office; the sea for the sentimentalist. But the absence of any artificial narrative is, at any rate, a final justification for documentary. Here is the living scene (as it appeared to Flaherty) recreated in terms of living cinema. Here is the camera handled to bring out the very essence of this dramatic struggle for existence. Here is Man stripped of all time fighting Sea and Rock. Here is the perfect idyllic conception of the romantic mind, drawing on natural material and natural people for its screen interpretation.

Add to these films of Flaherty Epstein's *Finis Terrae*, a psychological approach to a quarrel among four fishermen, harvesting kelp on the island of Bannec off Brittany, perhaps the Czech *Storm Over Tatra*s and one or two other romanticisms, such as the lyrical visions of Walter Creighton, and our estimate of the romantic tradition will serve. An evolution through the use of exteriors in the theatrical film to the epic Western and travelogue; to simple observations of peoples, things and places in descriptive terms for which the camera is so well equipped; thus to Flaherty and the idyllic romantic theme of Man against Nature in the remote backwaters of the modern world.

### (ii) *The Realist (Continental) Tradition*

The realist approach to actually existing material and themes springs, in the first place, from the *avant-garde* film-makers in France, who, hypnotised by the facile tricks of the movie camera, produced for their own edification many short films dealing with one or other aspect of Parisian or provincial French life. Seldom profound but often witty, these pastiches were inspired by nothing more serious than kindergarten theory, their observations on the contemporary city scene being limited to obvious comparisons between poor and rich, clean and dirty, with a never-failing tendency towards the rhythmic movements of machinery and the implications of garbage cans. Providing excellent fodder for the film societies, these films were the typical product of an art-for-art's-sake movement. You may recall

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*Marche des Machines*, *Menilmontant* and *Emak Bakia* among the best. Only one figure, Cavalcanti, and one film, *Rien que les heures*, upon which most of the other films were based, emerged of real documentary interest.

Shot in four weeks at a cost of 25,000 francs, this first of the 'day in the life of a city' cycle preceded Ruttmann's *Berlin* by several months, although the latter film achieved premier public showing in Britain and America, thereby robbing Cavalcanti of much of his credit. *Rien que les heures* will be remembered as depicting the passage of time during a day in Paris, the same characters reappearing at different times and at different tasks. It was the first attempt to express creatively the life of a city on the screen.

Clumsy in construction to modern eyes, perhaps, particularly in its cutting, nevertheless in 1926 it broke fresh ground. It presented the possibility of interpreting the reality about us, as opposed to the sentimental idyll in remote parts of the Flaherty method. Man against Nature in distant islands marked the one purpose; Man against the Street, against the turmoil of the City, marked the other. Cavalcanti may have failed, at the time, to bring a full social realisation to the latter aim, may have lacked the vision to bring a cross-section of a City to the screen, but at the least *Rien que les heures* put us in touch with modern experience, attempted the dramatisation of familiar things in familiar surroundings, and in this small measure deserves recognition.

In some ways similar to Cavalcanti's film, Ruttmann's *Berlin* was in the making for eighteen months during 1926-7 as a Kontingent picture for Fox, in the conception of which Carl Mayer,<sup>1</sup> former scenarist of many famous story-films, and Karl Freund, artistic photographer, are credited with assistance.

With a fine swing it took us along the awakening suburbs into the City, where the day begins with revellers returning to and workmen leaving their homes. Presently, with much raising of blinds and opening of windows, the City gets to work, with a heavy traffic emphasis and the usual absorption with machines. Midday brings food; and a mixture of contrasts from class to class, till again work is resumed and a passing downpour of rain

<sup>1</sup> Mayer dissociated himself from the film before it was finished, maintaining that Ruttmann had departed from his (Mayer's) original idea of a film about ordinary people in their normal surroundings. Mayer died in London, in July 1944. Ruttmann, who remained in Germany under Hitler, was believed to have been killed on the Russian front.

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and a suicide fill in the afternoon. Transition to nightfall and the myriad amusements of the city worker, poor and rich, wind up to an abrupt and unsatisfying climax.

Ruttmann gained richly from the cutting methods of the Soviets. It was upon cutting and tempo that *Berlin* relied chiefly for its symphonic effect. That is why the opening, with its nicely moving images of wheels, rails, telegraph wires, couplings and landscapes, came across better than the observations of the City itself, which were prompted more by an aesthetic approach to the appearance of the scene than by the significance underlying it. But its importance in our estimate lies in marking a step still further away from the limits of the theatrical film, a still more exciting approach to reality which stirred our senses by its tempos and movements.

Since *Berlin* advanced the symphonic method of construction, there have been many attempts along similar lines to use everyday material for documentary films, mostly based on striving towards a final beauty of superficial observation of the modern scene. Commerce and industry of every description, cities and suburbs, traffic in air, on land and sea, great achievements of science and engineering, all these have been covered by the roving camera.

Ivens, the Dutchman, spent copious footage on the reclamation of the Zuiderzee, became involved over the mechanically created climax of *The Bridge*, created yet another spilling of water in *Rain*, took advertisement a rung further up the artistic ladder with *Philips-Radio* and departed to Russia for new ideas and locations, which he would appear to have found in a film for the League of Youth Movement, *Komsomol*, in which he reveals a completely new sociological outlook. Storck was another, more strictly of the *reportage* school, with his sensitively handled *Idylle à la plage* and fancifully shot *Images d'Ostende*. Basse was a third, closer to the Ruttmann school, with his *Abbruch und Aufbau, Markt in Berlin* and the ponderous *Deutschland von Gestern und Heute*.<sup>1</sup> Hackenschmied's symphonics of *Prague Castle* falls in the same class. To say nothing of the new French group which has sprung up since the coming of sound—Aurenche's wittily shot *Pirates du Rhône*, Alexandre's descriptive and solemn *Un Monastère*, and Lods's rather poorly conceived *La Vie d'un Fleuve* and more interesting *Le Mil* with its imaginative use of sound. Rutt-

<sup>1</sup> Basse died June 1946, near Potsdam.

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mann himself has continued to build on the symphonic basis of *Berlin* with the somewhat confused issues but well-tempo'd *World Melody* and the superficially approached drama of steel, *Acciaio*, for the Italians.

### (iii) *The News-Reel Tradition*

The ordinary twice-a-week news-reel has little in common with the characteristics of the documentary film except that they both go to actuality for their raw material. The news-reel's job is to present in simple descriptive terms and within the minimum of time the events of the day, in itemised form without bias or special viewpoint. Documentary's task, on the contrary, is the dramatisation and bending to special purpose of actuality, a method that demands time for thought and time for selection. Often, it is true, the subject-matter of news-reel is dramatic in itself, such as the launch of a liner or events relating to a political crisis,<sup>1</sup> but the cinematic approach to this material by the news-reel cameramen and editors is strictly descriptive and seldom creative. The material of news-reel, however, shot on the spot, has at various times given rise to pointed *reportage* and montage films that fall within the broad interpretation of documentary.

Best known of such work is, of course, the Kino-Eye theory of Dziga Vertov and his group of co-workers in the U.S.S.R. To quote from previous description: 'The object of the Kino-Eye is to build an international language of the cinema. The ordinary cine-fiction film already achieves this to a certain extent, but in most cases it is a false rendering of fact. A record must be made and kept and shown of all that happens around us, apart from news matter which is adequately dealt with in the news bulletin. The lens of the camera has the power of the moving human eye. It can and does go everywhere and into everything. It climbs the side of a building and goes in through the window; it travels over factories, along steel girders, across the road, in and out of trains, up a chimney stack, through a park . . . into the houses of the rich and poor; it stands in the street, whilst cars, trams, 'buses, carts flash by it on all sides . . . it follows this person down that alley and meets that one round the corner. . . .

<sup>1</sup> One of the most naturally dramatic incidents in the history of the screen was the news-reel item of the King Alexander assassination at Marseilles, 1934.

## THE NEWS-REEL TRADITION

'The workers of the Kino-Eye made their first manifesto in 1923, published in a paper called "Lef". But before this, from 1918 to 1922, Dziga Vertov worked alone as a pioneer and experimenter of the Kino-Eye, until between 1923 and 1925, a small group was formed, numbering among them Kaufman (Vertov's brother) and Kopaline. Since that date, the output of the group has increased, until now it may be said that the Kino-Eye group of the Vufku-kino is at the head of the documentary section of the Soviet cinema. The workers of the group rejoice in the name of *kinoki*, and of their work may be mentioned *The Struggle under Czarism*, *The Truth of Lenin*, *Kino Calendar*, *Stride Soviet*, *One Sixth Part of the World*, *The Eleventh Year*, *Spring*, *Give Us Air*, etc.

'The Kino-Eye makes use of all the particular resources of the cinema: of slow-motion, rapid-motion, reversed movement, composite and still photography, one turn—one picture, divided screen, microscopic lens, etc. It uses all the forms of montage in assembling and presenting its facts in a coherent order out of the chaos of modern life, and it seeks to establish a level of distinction among the thousands of phenomena that present themselves on all sides to the mind of the cine-director. All this was set down in length in a manifesto by Vertov in 1919.

'The whole of the visual theories of Vertov were summed up in *The Man with the Movie Camera*, which, although a fascinating exposition of the resources of the cinema and a marvellous example of technical accomplishment, was totally devoid of dramatic value. Throughout the film the spectator was constantly being reminded of the camera, for it was continually being brought before the eye on the screen. The film was punctuated by the interruption of a close up of the lens of the camera, the camera itself, and the eye of the cameraman. We travel along watching a cameraman photographing a lady in a carriage. We see on the screen what the camera of the cameraman is taking. We see the cameraman as the lady in the carriage sees him. We are alternately the camera and we see what the camera sees; then we are seeing the camera seeing what we saw before. At that point, we cease seeing the camera and see what we have just seen being developed and mounted in the studio laboratory. "Ah," we say to ourselves, "that is the Kino-Eye"...

'*The Eleventh Year* was a record of the construction of the Ukraine during the ten years of Soviet regime. Its theme was

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Man's attempted control over Nature; of civilisation over the primitive. Where before there had been waste ground, now there are towns. Water that was useless now supplies electricity for hundreds of homes. Thus the film went on with mines and pits and chimneys and smoke and workers. . . .

'With the coming of the sound film, the Kino-Eye theories expand to embrace the Kino-Radio. The camera becomes the ear as well as the eye. The *kinoki* become the *radioki*. They seek now to express their material in terms of Kino-Eye-sound, in the form of radio-vision.'<sup>1</sup>

Something of what Vertov is after in sound was demonstrated in *Enthusiasm* which, to quote from the notes in the Film Society programme (London, 15 November, 1931), 'aroused considerable and heated discussion in Russia both on aesthetic and methodological grounds. It arises from the situation in the Don industrial area, where production was for a while lagging behind the schedules of the Five Year Plan. Vertov was to compose a film to stimulate and speed up production, and his work takes the form of a battle on the industrial front after a portrayal of the emergence of the communal mentality in which such a struggle is vital. In official circles the complaint is made that the film has all the faults of capitalist production in minimising difficulties, and presenting the way to perfection in too easy a light, that it is rather a hymn of praise of ideal conditions than an examination of the problems of a difficult situation.'

Vertov, on his side, claimed that *Enthusiasm* represented the 'optic-tonal capture of the visible and audible world' and finally vindicated his theory of the supremacy of the actual, 'non-produced' event over the sterile artificiality of the studio. From our own reading of documentary, we can and must go a long way with Vertov in the actual collection of his material, and to a certain extent with his methods of editing, but we must diverge from his views when it comes to the question of subject interpretation and approach. He has, I am afraid, many of the faults which characterise the approach of the Continental Realists and has not succeeded, in any of the films which I have seen, in getting beneath the surface of his material. He is, I admit, master of his technique, but he is not, I submit, fulfilling the fundamental requirements of documentary by interpreting the problems set by his themes. He is prophetic, he is illustrative, he is occasionally

<sup>1</sup> Excerpts from *The Film Till Now* (Vision Press, 1949) (pp. 243-247).

dramatic; but he is neither philosophic nor instructive. His *Three Songs of Lenin*, edited from 150 films and perhaps the first Soviet hymn, confirms this opinion. It is obscure, romantic and bombastic, lacking construction and making no creative use of the sound track.

Before leaving the Russians, there should be reference made to Esther Schub, who has edited a considerable footage of news-reel material. None of her work has been presented in England but she is said to have been most successful in the films *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* and *The Russia of Nikolai II*.

Outside Russia, there have been occasional attempts at the purposeful shaping of news-reel material, among which we may note, but need not discuss, Alexandre's *Polish Corridor* (*Ombres sur l'Europe*) and the curious compilation of actual events contained in Williams's *Whither Germany?* The efforts of the Nazi propaganda bureau have also, one gathers, given birth to various news-reel assortments with added reconstruction scenes (Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* seems to be such a conception<sup>1</sup>), while the recent Jubilee Celebrations in this country saw much ransacking of vaults for news-reel items extending over a period of twenty-five years. Most of these films lack specific purpose and are technically assembled without much skill.

Of greater interest, but only recently available for inspection in England, would appear to be the *March of Time* series sponsored by the American periodical *Time*. At last, here would seem to be recognition of the possibilities of screen journalism. At last, here would appear to be a definite attempt to put decent reporting on the screen. *Time* has, I understand, despatched experienced staff cameramen to various parts of the world with instructions to use patience and tact and cinematic skill to obtain a *reportage* of the real origins lying behind contemporary events. A typical issue of the cinemagazine, which has a running time of twenty-five minutes and is issued monthly, contains four items: Re-armament in Europe, the political exploits of Huey Long, the Mexican Government's oppression of the Catholic Church, and America's race to span the Pacific by airplane as a means of retaining commercial supremacy in the Orient.<sup>2</sup> A commentary, in key with the ironic policy of its sponsors, accompanies the items and plentiful use is apparently made of animated diagrams. Without being in a position to judge methods of produc-

<sup>1</sup> Vide pp. 203, 279.

<sup>2</sup> As reported in *Variety*, 24 April, 1935.

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tion, none the less it is obvious that it is along such lines as these of the *March of Time* that cinema will develop its strictly journalistic and reporting side which, whatever its relations to documentary, at any rate has its roots in the same naturally observed and recorded material shaped to special purpose.

### (iv) *The Propagandist Tradition*

We have already remarked the peculiar suitabilities of the film as an instrument of propaganda. It is therefore not surprising to find that, running concurrently with the evolution of documentary, there has been an increasing tendency to realise and make use of the persuasive capacities of the medium. And it is true to observe that, whereas cinema serving the ends of profit has remained close to the theatrical tradition, cinema pursuing the ends of propaganda and persuasion has been largely responsible for the documentary method. Certainly cinema as a specific instrument of political propaganda gave rise to the characteristics of the Soviet school.

#### (A) SOVIET

Origins and styles, experiments with technique, have been described elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> It is only essential here to lay emphasis on the purposes behind production and the results therefrom.

In its first phase, Soviet cinema possessed an underlying ideology quite different from that of European and American production, its whole aim being propaganda in the strongest sense for the newly established Union. By the widespread exhibition of dramatic films reconstructing the events and conditions that motivated the Workers' Revolution, the State hoped to persuade and instruct its people in the new social beliefs. Cinema was recognised as an instrument of unparalleled persuasive properties and, so long as the essential purpose was expressed clearly and vividly, the artist was permitted considerable freedom of technique. Shortage of raw materials and scarcity of apparatus undoubtedly promoted experiment, but the real force, the vital power of the earlier and best Soviet films, was wholly inspired by a political urge.

<sup>1</sup> Vide chapter on Soviet Cinema in *The Film Till Now* (Vision Press), and articles by various authors in *Cinema Quarterly*.

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Among the first films were several that adopted styles and ideas from the theatre and were similar to, but more crude than, the American and European story-film. But the vitality of their blood-and-thunder subjects, together with their contemporary significance and their requirements of actual surroundings, suggested a departure from theatrical precedent and an experimentation with the celluloid itself. Both Kuleshov and Vertov are credited with these first attempts to approach film creation from an analysis of editing; the former with scientific experiments relating to the association of images, the latter with shaping news-reel material to greater purpose than the mere description of events. Let it suffice that out of these theories grew the big revolutionary films of Eisenstein<sup>1</sup> and Pudovkin—*Potemkin*, *October*, *Mother*, *The End of St Petersburg*—which made use of the living scene, either as an integral part of the story or as a background from which common types could be drawn. Pudovkin, of course, chose the method of taking individuals (for which he sometimes used actors) to express the spirit of the mass, while Eisenstein, in his first three films, took the mass as a whole to interpret impersonally his given themes. Both made use of and developed further the scientific method of editing material evolved from the earlier experiments of Kuleshov.

It was in connection with *October*, the film which dealt with the political issues and personalities of the events which culminated in the Workers' Revolution of 1917, that we hear first of the ideological conception; where Eisenstein made use of his brilliant knowledge of film techniques to shape an entirely new form of cinema. Referring to his scenario, he is said to have written: 'It films the Tenth Anniversary of the October Revolution. The scenario groups round the period from the February to the October Revolution. It is made from historic material.'<sup>2</sup>

For this material Eisenstein had obviously to rely on the reconstruction of scenes and incidents which had taken place nearly ten years earlier, but which could be re-staged with a fair amount of accuracy and little artificial assistance. Political in purpose, both in director's aim and that of the forces controlling production, *October* undertook the selection and presentation of actual events and persons, not for accurate historical description but for the expression of a definite viewpoint which conformed with a definite political regard for the affairs of 1917. Hence you

<sup>1</sup> Died Moscow, February 1948.

<sup>2</sup> *Cinema Quarterly*, vol. ii, no. 4.

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will remember the omission of Trotsky. Not only the simple forms of dramatic construction, but the subtler observations of irony and caricature were employed by the director to persuade the spectator towards the desired political acceptance of the facts. Hence the brilliant ironic characterisation of Kerensky. This, you may say, is merely the result of propagandist aim. It is. But it is also something more. It is creating a form of documentary approach which gives new meanings to familiar things; not representing persons and things as they are, but relating them in such a manner to their surroundings that they temporarily assume new significance. Actual events and actual phenomena are transformed by the powers of the film into material which can be shaped to take on different significances according to the director's aim; in this case to serve a political end by means of a dialectical treatment.

From a historical point of view, the second phase of the Soviet cinema demanded themes which would project the urgent necessity for social and economic reconstruction along the lines of the first Five Year Plan, to inspire in peasant and worker minds a faith for which no sacrifice and no enthusiasm could be too great. At all cost the Plan must be put through, a subject rich in film themes but more difficult to dramatise than the earlier revolutionary subjects. In most cases they dealt with the passing of the old and the coming of the new, the triumph of the fresh order over past beliefs, the winning over of the superstitious peasant; in other words, the problems of a country going to school.

*Earth*, *The General Line* and *Turksib* are the films that claim attention; but more by their avoidance of issues than by their success. Dovjenko, artist though he may be, shirked the real theme of *Earth* by an escape into a romantic idyll of nature, beautiful and sensitive artistically, but materialistically of small significance. Eisenstein, discovering that he had little real interest in collectivisation, sidetracked into a display of technical fireworks that greatly enriched his foreign reputation, filling in the gaps with comedy relief borrowed from American slapstick. Turin's *Turksib* alone defined the line of Soviet approach to pure documentary, for it discarded the story form altogether and in grand style dramatised the economic need for and the building of the Turkestan-Siberian railway. It posed a problem arising out of the economic-geographic character of the regions con-

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cerned, dramatised in an impressionist style the gathering of the material for the building of the railroad, and concluded with a superbly constructed passage carrying a plea that the railway must be finished within a certain period of time. Both in technical style and approach, *Turksib* marked the beginning of a new documentary method and has probably had more influence on later developments than any other picture, not excluding Ruttmann's *Berlin*. It was greeted with sincere enthusiasm, not only in the Union, but by many hundreds of British schoolchildren, to whom this railway became as important for the moment as anything in their own country. But it is only fair to put on record that *Turksib* owed not a little of its success to Grierson's editing of the English version.

Of the more recent phases of the Soviet cinema only a few examples have come to hand outside their country of origin, but there is certainly a very wide tendency to develop the documentary and instructional film. The work of directors like Vladimir Schneiderov, Blioch, Posselsky, Yerofeyev and Kolo-tosov, and the fact that film expeditions have penetrated far into the Arctic, into Turkey, Arabia and Persia, indicate that the most interesting developments are taking place with the documentary approach to actual experience. Within the film centres, at Moscow, Leningrad, Rostock and Odessa, problems of sound and problems of expressing a new ideology dealing with the building of a new country and the teaching of a new generation absorb current production. *Men and Jobs*, *Counterplan* and *Salt of Spauetia* are the more interesting films. But, to judge from the Kino Conference which preceded the Moscow Film Festival of 1935, there would appear to be a tendency for a less impersonal approach and a greater emphasis on the position of the human being, tendencies with which we shall deal later.

We can, however, estimate for our documentary purpose that the Soviet approach to the living theme and living scene, inspired by the ideology of a new political and social system, gave rise to new forms of technical construction and to new interpretations of natural material which were to lay a new basis for documentary production. It was, in fact, a very definite advance on the technical methods of the romantic school and of considerably more importance to modern needs than the ancient struggle of Man against Nature, or the impressionist patterns of the Continental Realists. Later, we shall see how this important

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school of propaganda production based its approach on the dialectic method, threw over the old conception of ideas being more valuable than material facts and built the beginnings of a new tradition in documentary—the dialectic form.

### (B) BRITISH

Cinema as an expression of national publicities created documentary in Britain. In the form of a Government department, the Empire Marketing Board was initiated in 1928 to 'promote all the major researches across the world which affect the production or preservation or transport of the British Empire's food supplies'<sup>1</sup>.

There were forty-five departments in all, of which the Film Unit was the last, for cinema naturally enjoyed less consideration than regional sales-drives, accounts of wastage in imported fruit, retail surveys at home and abroad, or researches entomological and mycological. Even under the banner of Publicity, cinema came junior to poster advertising and leaflet distribution.

Out of these humble beginnings, with little money for wages or apparatus, there grew a film unit which laid in Britain the seeds of documentary; which was to become, and I say this in full awareness of its implications, this country's most important contribution to cinema as a whole.

Criticised on many sides, especially by the Trade, the Unit has gradually accumulated prestige and increased the quality of its work since its inception. Such progress was largely due to two causes: the personal vitality and ability of John Grierson, at first director and later producer of the Unit, and the wisdom of the E.M.B. officials, notably Sir Stephen Tallents, in allowing the production of its films to create a gradual effect on the public mind rather than a sudden, but quickly forgotten, overnight impression. Not only did this far-sighted policy achieve a more valuable contribution to public feeling, but it permitted the personnel of the Unit a certain freedom to experiment with technical matters impossible under conditions obtaining in the profit-making studios. The result produced the only *group* of film minds outside the Soviet Union which has a real understanding of the purpose and making of documentary—that is to say, which can 'bring to life' in terms of cinema some of the essential factors and problems of modern experience.

<sup>1</sup> 'The E.M.B. Film Unit', John Grierson, *Cinema Quarterly*, vol. i, no. 4.



MOANA (American 1926)  
Famous-Players-Lasky: *directed by* ROBERT J. FLAHERTY



BERLIN: THE SYMPHONY OF A CITY (German 1927)

## THE PROPAGANDIST TRADITION

I do not claim that the E.M.B. Film Unit projected all the subjects of documentary or even a hundredth part of them. That was neither possible nor desirable within its powers of production. But it did, and none but the most prejudiced can deny this, bring certain aspects of modern Britain to life on the screen with a sincerity and skill unapproached by any commercially operating company, at the same time bringing into existence a co-operative method of working and a spirit of loyalty which is notably absent in most other centres of film manufacture.

From a sociological point of view, the E.M.B. also represented the first attempt to portray the working-class of Britain as a human, vital factor in present-day existence, to throw on the screen the rough labour of the industrial worker, the skill of the trained craftsman and the toil of the agricultural labourer.

To return to actual films, Walter Creighton (with a reputation as a producer of pageants and tattoos)<sup>1</sup> and Grierson, the original joint officers of the Unit, made their first beginnings by an analysis of what had been done in the way of national projection in other countries and showing the findings to the powers-that-were. We may note that among the exhibits were *Berlin*, *The Covered Wagon*, *The Iron Horse* and sundry Soviet pictures. Ultimately the idea was sold and money arrived for production. Grierson made *Drifters*, Creighton made *One Family*; this was 1929.

In that *Drifters* is Grierson's only personally directed film, it has come to be regarded as being more important than it actually is, or was, for that matter, intended to be. Made on a shoestring (Creighton had most of the money for production), with little previous practical experience, it humbly brought to the screen the labour of the North Sea herring catch from such an approach that the ordinary person was made to realise, probably for the first time, that a herring on his plate was no mere accepted thing but the result of other men's physical toil and possibly courage. It 'brought alive' (an E.M.B. phrase) not just the routine of the catch but the whole drama of emotional values that underlay the task, interpreting in its stride the unconscious beauty of physical labour in the face of work done for a livelihood. Moreover, there was brought to the conception all the poetic

<sup>1</sup> In this connection we may also note that Eisenstein was a producer of pageants, such as the Red Square spectacle, and such sequences as the procession along the mole in *Potemkin* reveal influence of this training.

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qualities of ships, sea and weather. In other words, Grierson took a simple theme (there for the taking), took actually existing material (there for the shooting), and built a dramatised film by interpreting the relationships of his theme and material in the sphere of daily existence.

Leaving style and technique apart, *Drifters* laid the foundation for documentary in this country. Maybe it lacked a full expression of social purpose. Powers of production limited that. But it was inspired by a greater aim than mere description or superficial observation. It was inspired by a sincere understanding of the labour of man and the poetry of the sea. Beyond that, it served, and served well, a purpose beyond itself.

After an experimental 'illumination' school film, *Conquest*, compiled chiefly from library material, Grierson turned producer and by so doing enabled production to grow as a whole under his supervision. One by one fresh minds, all young and willing to work for the humble wages that documentary could pay, were enlisted to the Unit. 'The problem', writes Grierson, 'was not so much to repeat that relative success (*Drifters*) but to guarantee that, with time, we should turn out good documentaries as a matter of certainty. It was a case of learning the job not on the basis of one director, one location and one film at a time, but on the basis of half-a-dozen directors with complementary talents and a hundred and one subjects all along the line.'<sup>1</sup>

Thus the product of the group is not to be measured fairly by the work of one individual director but rather by their collective effort; certain directors revealing a flair for handling mechanical industrial subjects, others for a more lyrical approach. Flaherty's *Industrial Britain* brought an appreciation of the beauty of camera movements but, for the most part, development came from within the group itself and not from outside assimilation.

Of their films we may include here only the outstanding, which are to be regarded in the light of experiment rather than as mature work: *The Voice of the World*, *Shadow on the Mountain*, and *Aero-Engine* from Elton; *O'er Hill and Dale*, *Country Comes to Town*, *Cargo from Jamaica* and *Windmill in Barbados* from Wright; *New Generation* from Legg; and *Lancashire at Work* from Taylor. Such was the production list, along with many lesser efforts, when the Government, overwhelmed by economic responsibilities, saw fit

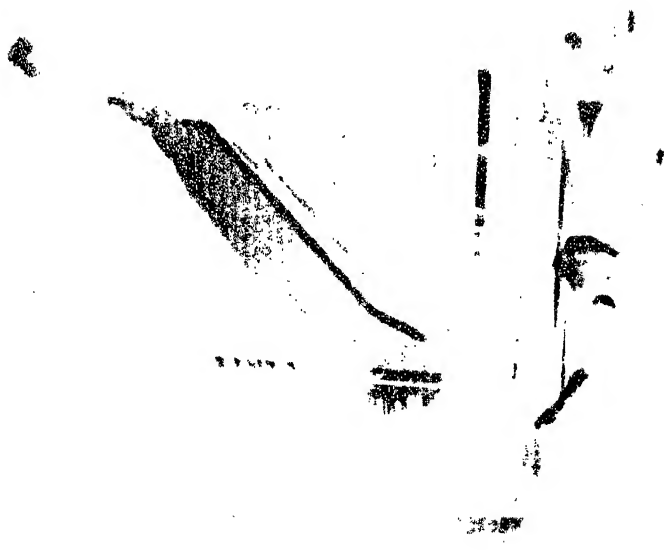
<sup>1</sup> *Cinema Quarterly*, vol. i, no. 4.



FINIS TERRAE (French, 1928)  
Société Générale de Films: *directed by* JEAN EPSTEIN



TURKSIB (Soviet 1928)  
Vostok-kino: *directed by* VICTOR TURIN



RIEN QUE LES HEURES (French 1926)  
Néofilm: *directed by* ALBERTO CAVALLANTI

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to abolish the Empire Marketing Board as a whole, including the Film Unit and its by-then comprehensive film library of original pictures and re-editings of material gathered from many sources.

Happily for documentary, however, the department of the Post Office was inspired to take over the running of the Unit in order to play a part in the public relations of that department, together with the library of films which '... it was felt ... with its pictures of life in Great Britain and in so many overseas parts of the Empire, afforded the best possible setting for a special series of films depicting those postal, airmail, telegraphic and telephonic resources by which communications are maintained within the United Kingdom and between the United Kingdom and the rest of the Empire'.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, within the special limits of propaganda for communications and research, the new G.P.O. Film Unit is beginning to explore the world of documentary sound in the same way that the E.M.B. Unit explored the world of visuals, a task in which Cavalcanti is greatly aiding.<sup>2</sup> Discarding the belief that sound is a technical secret held only by experts, they are experimenting as they experimented with the camera the whole untouched field of orchestrated and imagistic sound, with the interesting results that are seen in the first group of the new films: *Weather Forecast*, *Under the City*, *Six-Thirty Collection*, *Cable-Ship* and *Droitwich*.

We may, or may not, agree with all the work that this Unit, first as the E.M.B. and now as the G.P.O., has produced. Some of it is stylised, some of it is pretentious, but at the least it does represent an immensely valuable contribution to cinema and has explored the method of documentary more fully than any other producing group in Britain or America. Notwithstanding its limitations of approach and subject, it has made production possible in a manner impossible in the ordinary commercial field. For that alone, anyone who cares at all about the education and social progress of this country should be grateful. But perhaps its

<sup>1</sup> Preface to the G.P.O. Film Library Catalogue, 1933.

<sup>2</sup> The G.P.O. Film Unit came under the Ministry of Information in September 1939, and was renamed the Crown Film Unit in April 1940. Grierson resigned as producer in 1937; subsequent producers have been J. B. Holmes, Ian Dalrymple, Alexander Shaw, Basil Wright and John Taylor. Vide pp. 250-255. The fullest account of the E.M.B., G.P.O. and Crown Film Units up till 1946 is contained in the Arts Enquiry report, *The Factual Film* (Oxford University Press, 1947), the final draft of which was prepared by Sinclair Road under the editorship of an anonymous committee.

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greatest achievement has been to act as a training school for documentary and a sorting house for theory and practice such as does not exist anywhere else in the world except in Russia. Without its presence, I am quite certain that documentary would not exist on the high scale that it does in Britain today. I emphasise this aspect of the Unit especially in view of the many attacks which have been made against it by those who are influenced by Trade prejudice and by those who resent the success achieved by its originators. We must remember, for the moment, that every significant director of British documentary has, at one time or another, either been a member of, or has been closely associated with, the Unit. Such recent and important pictures as *The Song of Ceylon*, *For All Eternity*, *Coal Face*, *Citizens of the Future*, Shaw's films for the Orient line and Elton's for the Gas Association, have all had their origins of style and thought in Grierson's Unit. In five years it has brought considerable repute to this country as a film-producing centre, repute of a kind that lives longer and goes further than a flag-wagging story-film.

### (C) GERMAN AND ITALIAN

Mention has already been made of the vital quality infused into the Soviet films by propaganda for political and social ends. From a technical aspect, it is regrettable that there has been no opportunity in Britain for viewing the political films of the German Nazis and the Italian Fascists. Dr Goebbels, we read, having had the entire German Film Trade (or what remains of it) on the carpet, held up the *Potemkin* of his enemies as a paragon of what propaganda films should be. As a result, there would appear to be at any rate two films of technical interest to documentary. Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, a sort of document-biography of Hitler, apparently contains sequences of technical virtuosity, leading us to suppose that the interpretation of a political ideology has greatly changed the anaemic outlook of the director of *The Blue Light*. I am told, also, that *The Right of Man*, another documentary, is conceived and executed with a brilliance of technique.

From Italy we have seen only portions of the not very successful *Acciaio*, by Ruttmann, and portions of a film glorifying the achievements of Mussolini in the reclamation work of the Pontine Marshes, neither of which suggested that there was any

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indication of an understanding of the documentary method in Italy.

These, then, are the main sources and traditions from which documentary as we know it today has sprung. With the general use of the natural exterior and the real human being as a background, with the romantic idealism of Flaherty offset by the aesthetic realism of the Continental Realists, with propaganda as a basis for the Soviets and the Grierson Unit, with one or two individuals here and there, like Ivens and Storck, we have arrived at a point where we may discuss theories and first principles, and try and relate documentary to the common needs of society.



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### III

## SOME PRINCIPLES OF DOCUMENTARY



### III

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Every tendency in cinema reflects the social and political characteristics of its period, which in turn may, or may not, according to your reasoning, be a reflection of the obtaining economic conditions. The documentary method, as a distinct kind of film, as an interpretation of social feeling and philosophic thought quite different in purpose and form from the entertainment motives of the story-film, has materialised largely as the result of sociological, political and educational requirements.

In the foregoing estimate of documentary traditions, we have tried to show that documentary is a genuine independent kind of cinema, as distinct from the story-film or photoplay as is the biography from the novel. Further, we have tried to define the main characteristics that exist between the plain descriptive pictures of everyday life (travel pictures, nature films, educationals and news-reels) that fall short of documentary requirements and the creative dramatisation of actuality and the expression of social analysis that are the first demand of the documentary method.

At any rate, it is clear, I think, that in purposeful documentary we enter a range of perception wider than has so far been attempted in descriptive films, for propaganda needs persuasive statements and implications that furrow deeply into the surface of modern experience. In the use of documentary for dialectical purpose, for example, we can conceive whole periods of time, symbolised by their existing heritages today, being arranged in dramatic shape to express a variety of outlooks. We can imagine how the fundamental sentiments of the human mind can be analysed and dissected to suit a multitude of purposes. The immense range of discursive power made possible by film technique suggests the documentary method as an admirable instrument for clarifying and coordinating all aspects of modern thought, in the hope of achieving a fuller analysis that may in

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turn lead to more definite conclusions.<sup>1</sup> But how does this interpretation of the documentary method evolve from the traditions which we have just described? Before we can arrive at even first definitions, the existing tendencies require further analysis to discover if they are progressing on the most suitable lines.

Flaherty serves us well to demonstrate the elementary demands of documentary. He asks an observation of natural material on its actual location, from which the theme may arise. Further, he asks an interpretation of that material, to bring it alive as a reality on the screen, which can be attained only by a complete understanding 'from the inside' of such material and its relationships. For his own method, he prefers the inclusion of a slight narrative, not fictional incident or interpolated 'cameos', but the daily routine of his native people. For his themes and locations he goes to those parts of the world where, supposedly, Man has still to fight Nature for his existence, although in most cases Flaherty reconstructs native life of a past or dying generation. The heroes of both *Nanook* and *Man of Aran*, for example, were waxwork figures acting the lives of their grandfathers. And it is precisely this choice which leads us to explore the validity of his approach in relation to documentary's social purpose.

In the modern world in which most of us live, it is doubtful if we are primarily interested in Man's primitive relationship with Nature. Pushing back the sea to build a quay wall, or damming a river to harness its energy, admittedly present great achievements of scientific and engineering skill. But does not their importance, from a social aspect, lie less in the actual feat itself than in its resultant effect upon the geography of the landscape and ultimately the benefit to the economic life of the people concerned? The idyllic documentalist, it is true, is chiefly interested in Man's conquering of natural objects to bend them to his ends. Admittedly, the sea was an obstacle to communication until Man built ships to cross it. The air was useless to Man's economic life, except as wind-power, until he learnt to fly through it. The minerals of the earth were valueless until Man discovered how to mine. And, in the same way, production today is generally acknowledged to be more than sufficient to meet the needs of the community. But the success of science and machine-controlled

<sup>1</sup> Later practical examples of this theory have been the Canadian *World in Action* series, the U.S. Army's *Why We Fight* series, the argument films, *The World is Rich* and *World of Plenty*, and Van Dongen's *News-Review No. 2*.

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industry has resulted in an unequal distribution of the amenities of existence under the relationships of the present economic system. Side by side with leisure and well-being there is also unemployment, poverty and wide social unrest. Our essential problem today is to equate the needs of the individual with production, to discuss the most satisfactory economic system and to present the social relationships of mankind in their most logical and modern ordering. Despite their braveries, Man's fight against the fury of the Sea, Man's creation of unnatural pain to prove his manhood, Man's battle against snow and ice and animals are of secondary interest in a world where so many urgent and larger problems demand our attention.

Granted that we may not expect the sentimentalist director to grapple with the materialist problems of our age, but at least we may expect from him an acknowledgement of their existence. Surely we have the right to believe that the documentary method, the most virile of all kinds of film, should not ignore the vital social issues of this year of grace, should not avoid the economic relationships which govern the present productive system and, consequently, determine the cultural, social and aesthetic attitudes of society?

Let Flaherty's fine feeling for photography stand, accept his unique sensibility to natural movements and his grand poetic vision of Man against the Sky, confess (in passing) that *Man of Aran* avoided all the important issues raised by sound, but let us realise, in the face of all the guilt of Venice, that the Flaherty method is an evasion of the issues that matter most in the modern world, is devoid of any attempt at serious social analysis. Give to Flaherty his credits; and they are many. Acknowledge our deep obligation to his pioneer spirit, his fierce battles to break down commercial stupidity and the bravery of his struggle against the despicable methods of exploitation from which he has suffered. But realise, at the same time, and within the sphere of documentary, that his understanding of actuality is a sentimental reaction towards the past, an escape into a world that has little contemporary significance, a placing of sentimentalism above the more urgent claims of materialism.<sup>1</sup>

No slums or factories, no employment exchanges or income-tax bureaux, no weekly rents or tithes exist in this fairy world of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Richard Griffith's estimate of Flaherty, pp. 319-321, especially in relation to *The Land*. Vide also tributes to Flaherty in *Sight and Sound*, vol. xxi, No. 2, 1951.

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make-believe created by the romantic tradition of documentary. Only Man against Nature; cruel, bitter, savage and heroic but unrelated to modern society. Industry and commerce are as remote as their carved symbols which flank the Albert Memorial, or as the muscular stalwarts that lean nonchalantly on slender sledge-hammers and the bronzed workers who flourish torches of servility under the nose of good Victoria. True, Flaherty observed in his own way the craftsmanship of the potter and the glassblower when in the Midlands for *Industrial Britain*, but is it not significant that those very trades are fading before the advance of mass-production and machinery? And did not the filming of coal and steel and other heavy industry in that film fall to other hands?

In every location which he has chosen there have existed social problems that demanded expression. Exploitation of native labour, the practices of the white man against the native, the landlords of Aran, these have been the vital stories, but from them Flaherty has turned away. Probably he realised that their exposure would have clashed with the interests controlling the production and distribution of his films. It was not, we may grant, in his power to expose. Instead he was content to present the 'braveries of all time'. Certainly he retreated into an acceptance of the irrelevance which is the fate of all escapists. Idyllic documentary is documentary without significant purpose. It takes romanticism as its banner. It ignores social analysis. It takes ideas instead of facts. It marks a reactionary return to the worship of the heroic, to an admiration of the barbaric, to a setting up of 'The Leader'.

The symphonic approach of the Continental Realists, on the other hand, goes at first appearance to realism. But for the most part the French and German directors see the documentary film as a work of art in itself, as a symphony of tempos and movements, rather than that the art should be an offshoot of the larger issue of a job well done to meet a special purpose.

Thus the symphonic conception of *Berlin* provides a pleasant enough pyrotechnical exercise, skimming over the many tantalising rhythms of modern life in street and factory and countryside, without thought of the 'how' and 'wherefore' underlying the social scene. Yet, despite their exciting tempos, despite their bustle and thronging of modern city life, these big and little symphonies of big and little cities create nothing more valuable

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to civilisation than a shower of rain. All the outward signs of a busy metropolis are there. People work and eat: a suicide and a wedding: but not one single implication underlies it all.

Again there is evasion, a deliberate self-satisfaction in the surface rhythms of a printing-press or the processions of a milk-bottling machine, but nothing of inflated circulations or wages paid, nothing to suggest that the social and economic relations contained in the subject are the real material of documentary. The manufacture of steel is visually exciting. Ruttmann, Dr Kaufmann and Basse have shown us that. But they did not think to show us that steel builds bridges, builds ships to cross the seas, radio masts to throw a girdle of communication round the earth, pylons to carry a new power up the length and breadth of the land, knives to eat with and needles to sew with. They did not tell us that steel is a State ceremony, that its foundrymen and smiths are in a sense national figures: nor that its labour might be underpaid, its risks horrifying and its markets cut across by private speculation.

Based on the same method of approach, but lacking the technical trickery that made *Berlin* of interest, Basse's film *Deutschland von Gestern und Heute* admirably epitomises the realist tradition of the Continental school. Cross-sectioning in painful detail almost every aspect of German life, it is typical of the method in that it observes the pictorial surface of the scene but refuses to penetrate beneath the skin. It is said for Basse that he intended to show how the style of living in former times is still affecting modern life, that from the prehistoric forms of a primitive economic system the film leads historically over the Gothic style to Renaissance, from baroque to rococo, from the *Biedermeierzeit* to the complacency of present middle-class society, the provincial character of which makes possible the crescendo of a modern city's activity.<sup>1</sup> But I do not find Basse doing anything of the sort.

Instead, we have all the ingredients of the photographer's album, townspeople and countryfolk, pastimes and processions, customs and conventions, industry and agriculture, mediaeval city and modern metropolis. They are all neatly shuffled and labelled, arranged in order like a good picture-book, with the camera roving here and there and round about. But as with Ruttmann, so with Basse. Nothing is related socially. Nothing is said creatively. Nothing lives. The long-winded procession of

<sup>1</sup> Vide Arnheim, *Cinema Quarterly*, vol. ii, no. 3.

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images, some of them not too well photographed, meanders along without drive or purpose. Running to story-feature length, this film more than any other exposes the weakness of a purposeless theme. It is as if Basse just did not care how and why his images came to be. Unrelated geographically, they are put together in some form of contrast from which a mild implication might be drawn, but there is no essential aim behind it all. A few fleeting comments on the childishness of official parades, passing observations on the idiotic behaviourism of the *petite bourgeoisie*, but that is all. Had it been political, had it been sociological, had it been a compromise of respective description, it might have had point.

The visual arabesques of plunging pistons, the endless streams of trams and trains, the ballet movements of spinning bobbins, the belching issue of a steel furnace, the plough team and the harvest and the tractor, these as beautiful, exciting, poetic things in themselves are the main delights of the pseudo-realist approach. More difficult, perhaps, than the noble savage hero, who in himself is a curious being, but even more escapist for its delight in surface values; more subtle because of its treating with familiar scenes but more dangerous because of its artistic avoidance of vital issues. Its virtue lies in the surface beauties of techniques and tempos; its value is craftsmanship with no end in view except its own virtuosity. It may have poetry, lyricism, beauty of movement, sensibility, but these are minor virtues. The point is well made in Grierson's criticism of Elton's *Voice of the World*, a documentary of radio-gramophone production.

'Concentration on movement and rhythmic good looks obscures *importance* of the instrument. The building and *delivery* of the instrument, the key to the situation, not dramatised sufficiently. The result powerful but less than heroic. Elton possibly unappreciative of radio's social significance and therefore lacking in proper (aesthetic) affection for subject. This point important, as affecting almost all the tyros of documentary. Too damned arty and post-War to get their noses into public issues. Miss accordingly the larger dramatic themes possible to the medium.'<sup>1</sup>

The Continental Realists and their many imitators, then, are occupied principally by their interpretation of surface rhythms. They fail to appreciate the significance of their images or tempos. They give us a concerto of rotating wheels as a visual rhythm but

<sup>1</sup> *Cinema Quarterly*, vol. i, no. 2.



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THE GENERAL LINE (Soviet 1929)

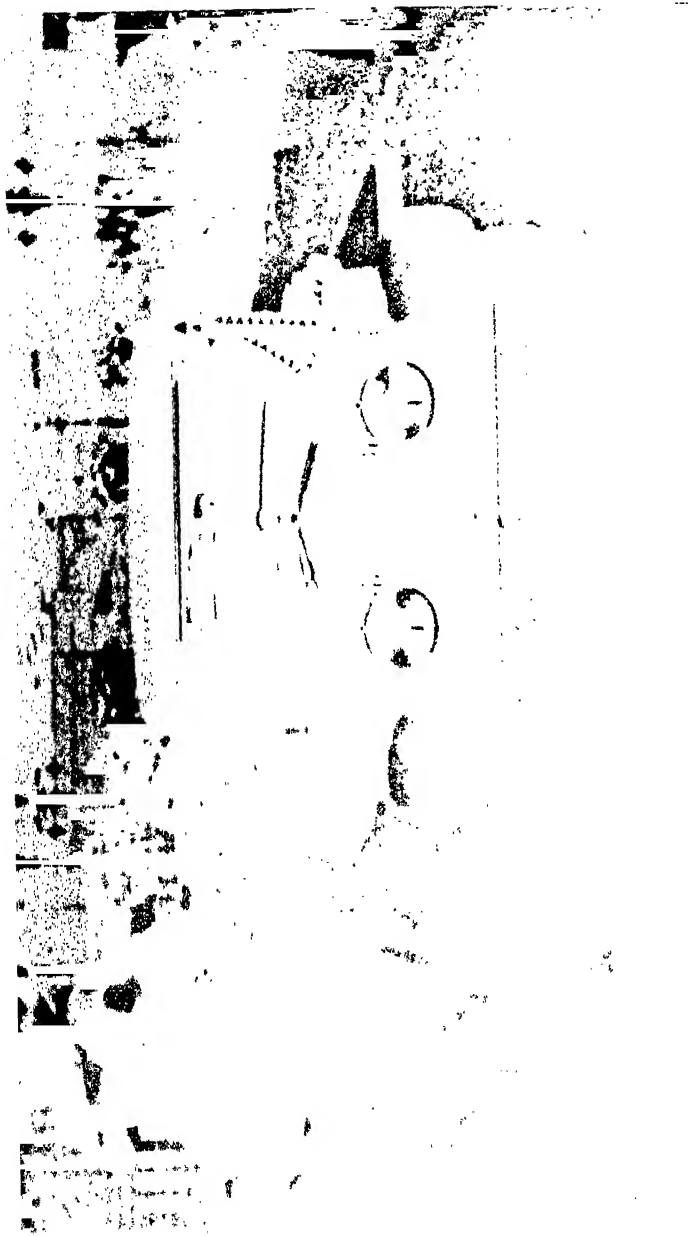
Sovkino: *directed by* SERGEI EISENSTEIN and G. ALEXANDROV



THE GENERAL LINE (Soviet 1929)

Sovkino: *directed by* SERGEI EISENSTEIN and G. ALEXANDROV

ASSASSINATION OF KING ALEXANDER OF YUGOSLAVIA  
MARSEILLES, October 9, 1934  
(Gaumont-British News)



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do not realise that these stand as images of an epoch, symbols of an era of economic industrialism; and that only by relating these images to the human society which has given them existence can they become of real interest on the contemporary screen.

Analysis of all the tendencies of documentary, in fact, gives rise to the criticism that one of the real issues of modern society is being almost wholly avoided. In this age of social realism, surely one of the first aims of documentary should be to examine the problem of Man's place in society? Surely it is pointless, if not impossible, to bring alive the realities of the modern world unless we do so in such a manner as to base our themes on the relationship of Man to the world in which he lives? Machinery, agriculture, craftsmanship, culture and the rest cannot be divorced from their human fulfilments. Yet this is the very mistake into which some of our documentarists seem to have fallen. Apparently they fail to realise that the basis of the documentary method is a materialistic basis; that it is the material circumstances of civilisation which create and condition the present cultural, sociological, political, religious and aesthetic ideas of society.

On almost every side, moreover, documentary has deliberately been allowed to avoid the existence of the human being as the main factor in civilisation. Certainly people of many types have appeared in documentary but they have rarely been treated as anything but impersonal puppets. In following a path opposite to that of the story-film, documentary has been permitted to prefer the mass to the individual, or, in some cases, simply an impersonal statement of facts. Not only have the documentarists failed to relate the mass to the individual, but, despite the fact that their material and subjects are naturalistic, they have also failed to relate their themes to current social consciousness.

It is interesting, at this point, to note that this problem of setting the human being against a naturalistic environment is the main subject of discussion in the present Soviet kino. Practically the whole of the preliminary closed conference preceding the Moscow Film Festival of 1935 was given over to criticism of the Soviet cinema's inability to recognise and incorporate the individual in its films. That is why *Chapaev*, a dull film technically, was accorded such praise. That is why we have Dinamov making the plea that 'the theory of a film without a plot is a very dangerous theory', and Eisenstein stating that 'a film without emotional feeling is scarcely worth consideration'.

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The fact is that since the Russians left their initial period of blood-and-thunder and strike, since the era of *Mother* and *Potemkin*, not one of them has succeeded in tackling the problems set by a new state of society, unless it will be Dovjenko in his new film *Air-City*. It was one thing to evolve a set of rhythms which made the Odessa Steps massacre a scene of tremendous emotion, but quite another to relate the working of a milk separator to collective farming. So, in *The General Line*, we had a fine display of fireworks and slapstick by an expert showman; in *A Simple Case*, a set of artificial people with petty passions and a return to the Civil War for blood-and-thunder action, which all the splendid improvisations of a 'Birth and Regeneration' sequence failed to justify. From his insistence on the importance that the real struggle lay at one's own backdoor, we might suspect that Pudovkin saw the fault in *Deserter*, but, as Grierson pointed out, he still evaded the issue by retreating to the street riots of Hamburg (so like the *St Petersburg* location) and observed the working of his Russian factory with all the badness of a great artist.

Nor, when all was said and done, did the enthusiasms of a hundred thousand toilers in a Dziga Vertov cacophony do much to solve the task. Nearer the mark was *Counterplan*, in which the ideas were better than their fulfilment; but most progressive of all, to my mind, was *Men and Jobs* which grappled with the problem of the untrained worker at the building of Dnieperstroï. Here, at least, was a bid to meet the issues of Russia going to school. The human being was, in a sense, related to the problems from which the theme arose. As persuasion for the shock brigader to learn from American efficiency, it was probably effective. But observe that the philosophy was still unsound. Enthusiasm, no matter how inspired, can never conquer science. Together they may achieve idealist aims but no engineer's science can be learnt as this film suggested. A crane is not worked by enthusiasm, although a film may have it so. A dam is not built by faith alone. A country cannot exist on a diet of ideology. And, in this measure also, *Men and Jobs* minimised its task.

Equally in their own sphere, the E.M.B. films of Britain avoided the major issues provoked by their material. That was inevitable under their powers of production. The real economic issues underlying the North Sea herring catch, the social problems inherent in any film dealing seriously with the Industrial

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Midlands, lay outside the scope of a Unit organised under a Government department and having as its aim 'the bringing alive of the Empire'. The directors concerned knew this, and wisely, I think, avoided any economic or important social analysis. Instead they contented themselves with attempting a simple statement of facts, dramatising the action material of their themes, but leaving untouched the wider human fulfilments of the job.

It is strange that these many and varied efforts to realise and solve the problem of people in documentary are marked by an increasing, and perhaps dangerous, return to theatricalism. Having been freed from the banalities of the story-film, having been developed along fresh and stimulating lines, we may now be faced with the sad if faintly ironic spectacle of documentary returning, in spirit if not in material, to the studio. With the Russians arguing for a discontinuance of 'typage' and the resuscitation of the trained actor, with Ruttmann's linking of love with steel, and the G.P.O. Unit romanticising their Savings Banks and making a melodrama out of the designing of a stamp, it looks as if we shall yet see the all-star documentary, if indeed we have not already done so in *B.B.C.: The Voice of Britain*.

But the fact remains that this, one of documentary's most important problems, must be faced. Clearly a full and real expression of the modern scene and modern experience cannot be achieved unless people are observed in accurate relation to their surroundings. To do this, there must be establishment and development of character. There must be the growth of ideas, not only in theme, but in the minds of characters. Your individuals must be of the audience. They must be familiar in type and character. They themselves must think and convey their thoughts to the audience, because only in this way will documentary succeed in its sociological or other propagandist purpose. Documentary must be the voice of the people speaking from the homes and factories and fields of the people.

And it is these very requirements which will continue to distinguish documentary from the story-film. For in the latter, a character is seldom permitted to think other than trivial personal thoughts, or to have opinions in any way connected with the larger issues of existence. Just as in documentary the facts of the theme must be important facts, so also must be the charac-

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terisation and outlook possessed by the individuals, for they are, in turn, conditioned by those same facts. In documentary this is possible, whereas in the story-film, at any rate under present conditions of manufacture, facts and ideas as well as characterisation are suppressed in the interests of the balance sheet and technique alone is left to the director.

The foregoing severe criticism of purpose and method in documentary today is, of course, necessarily arbitrary. Documentary is a type of film possessing certain well-defined characteristics. Each of the films included in our estimate falls within its scope. But because they do not all carry the social analysis which, in some opinions, is documentary's most important task, does not deny their often brilliant craftsmanship or our respect for their director's outlook. Rather does this signify that, quite reasonably, interpretations of the documentary method may differ; that there are different intentions underlying different observations; that whereas Flaherty, for example, can find his theme in the heroic braveries of all time expressed through some up-to-date 'primitive' tribe, others find their material on the home front, in the back streets and factories and locations closer to those actualities among which so many of us live; that, whereas some prefer the attitude of romanticism, others of us set ourselves the task of building from a materialistic basis. It is purely a question of personal character and inclination, of how strongly you feel about satisfying private artistic fancies or communal aims. No director makes documentary simply for the wages he is paid. That we leave to the panjandrums of the story-film. Your documentarist creates documentary and believes in the documentary method of cinema because he considers it the most powerful means of social expression available today.

Yet, despite my plea that the maker of documentary should be politically and socially conscious in his approach to everyday experience, he has no claim to the label of politician. His job is not upon a platform to harangue the mob but in a pulpit to persuade the mass to a wider consideration of human affairs. He is neither a fighter nor a barnstormer. Rather is he a prophet concerned with the broadest references of human associations. He is a propagandist making use of the most influential instrument of his time. He does not march with the crowd but goes just ahead, asking contemplation and discussion before action is taken on those problems with which he deals. In cinema, it is the

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documentary method which has proved the most suitable for these ends because it is a method of philosophic reasoning.<sup>1</sup>

The immediate task of the documentarist is, I believe, to find the means whereby he can employ a mastery of his art of public persuasion to put the people and their problems, their labour and their service, before themselves. His is a job of presenting one half of the populace to the other; of bringing a deeper and more intelligent social analysis to bear upon the whole cross-section of modern society; exploring its weaknesses, reporting its events, dramatising its experiences and suggesting a wider and more sympathetic understanding among the prevailing class of society. He does not, I think, seek to draw conclusions but rather to make a statement of the case so that conclusions may be drawn. His world is in the streets, the homes, the factories and the workshops of the people, presenting this experience and that event to make his point. And if the documentary method today is being put to a double-headed use, if it is being employed to express a meaning within a meaning, then it is not the fault of the documentarist but of the time in which he lives.

Throughout this book I am laying emphasis on the documentary method rather than on documentary as a particular kind of film. For this reason, although documentary has been characterised by its creative use of the materials and apparatus of cinema, although it has made special use of actualities rather than of artificialities, it is the method which prompts this practise that is important and not the type of film produced. The documentary method will not, I believe, remain fixed in a world defined, on the one side, by *Drifters* and, on the other, by *Nanook*. Already the limits have been expanded to embrace such a poem as *Coal Face* and such a piece of journalistic reporting as *Housing Problems*. Story, characterisation and studio are likely to enter the documentary film but it will be the method and not the materials that will count. It will be the sociological, political or other purposes being served by the method which will continue to be of first importance.

In short, the documentary method is more complex than its traditions would have us believe. No longer is it the mere pictorial description of things and people and places of interest. Observation alone is not enough. Camera portrayal of movement, no

<sup>1</sup> Alas, how much of this has been forgotten or never learnt by the post-war documentary film-maker! (P.R.—1951).

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matter how finely observed, is purely a matter of aesthetic good taste. The essential purposes of documentary lie in the ends applied to this observation. Conclusions must be indicated and the results of observation must be put across in a manner that demands high creative endeavour. Below the surface of the modern world lie the actuating economic issues of modern civilisation. These are the real materials of purposeful documentary. In Industry, Commerce, Civics and Nature the mere superficial portrayal of actuality is insufficient. Such surface description implies no intellectual ability. Rather are the implications and fulfilments of his material the concern of the documentarist. It is the meaning *behind* the thing and the significance *underlying* the person that are the inspirations for his approach. To the documentary method, every manufacture, every organisation, every function, every scheme of things represents at one point or another the fulfilment of a human interest.

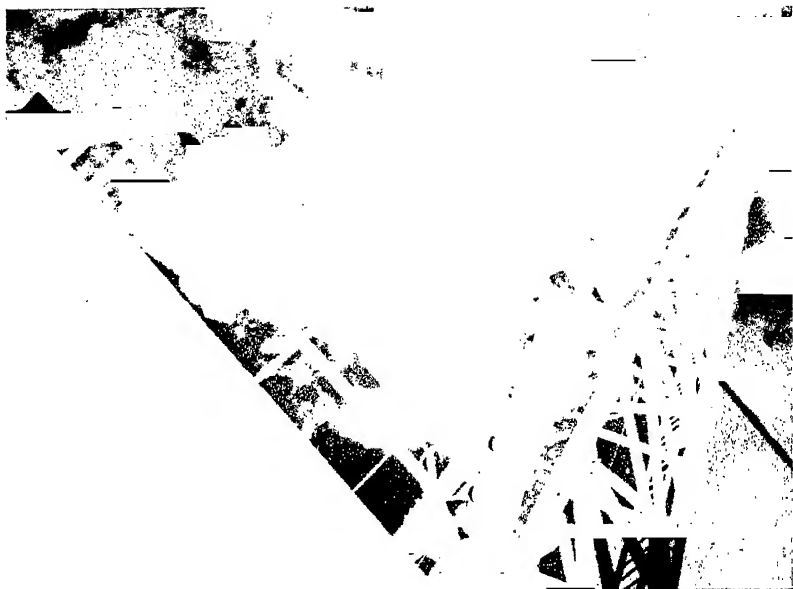
In such circumstances, it seems improbable that your hero can still be the noble savage of Flaherty's choosing, or the centrifugal rhythms of a crankshaft which deceive the pseudo-realist's mind. No matter whether politics, culture, economics or religion, we are concerned with the impersonal forces that dictate this modern world. The puny individual must be refocused into his normal relationship to the general mass, must take his place alongside in the community's solid struggle for existence and forsake personal achievement. Daily jobs, no matter how well described by rhetoric of camera and intimacy of microphone, are not documentary material in themselves. They must be related to the wider purposes of the community.

Above all, documentary must reflect the problems and realities of the present. It cannot regret the past; it is dangerous to prophesy the future. It can, and does, draw on the past in its use of existing heritages but it only does so to give point to a modern argument. In no sense is documentary a historical reconstruction and attempts to make it so are destined to failure. Rather is it contemporary fact and event expressed in relation to human associations.

Frequently I hear it said that documentary aims at a true statement of theme and incident. This is a mistaken belief. No documentary can be completely truthful, for there can be no such thing as truth while the changing developments in society



INDUSTRIAL BRITAIN (British 1933)  
E.M.B. Film Unit: *directed by* ROBERT J. FLAHERTY



B.B.C.: THE VOICE OF BRITAIN (British 1934-35)  
G.P.O. Film Unit: *directed by* STUART LEGG



WE LIVE IN TWO WORLDS (British 1937)  
G.P.O. Film Unit: *directed by* ALBERTO CAVALCANTI

## SOME PRINCIPLES OF DOCUMENTARY

continue to contradict each other. Not only this, but technical reasons also preclude the expression of a completely accurate representation. It is often suggested that documentary has close similarity to the news-reel. By the Trade they are naturally confused because they both, in their respective ways, deal with natural material.<sup>1</sup> But there the likeness ends. Their approach to and interpretation of that material are widely different. The essence of the documentary method lies in its dramatisation of actual material. The very act of dramatising causes a film statement to be false to actuality. We must remember that most documentary is only truthful in that it represents an attitude of mind. The aim of propaganda is persuasion and persuasion implies a particular attitude of mind towards this, that or the other subject. To be truthful within the technical limits of the camera and microphone demands description, which is the aim of the instructional film, and not dramatisation, which is the qualification of the documentary method. Thus even a plain statement of fact in documentary demands dramatic interpretation in order that it may be 'brought alive' on the screen.

We may assume, then, that documentary determines the approach to a subject but not necessarily the subject itself. Further, that this approach is defined by the aims behind production, by the director's intentions and by the forces making production a possibility. And because of the film camera's inherent capacity for reproducing a semblance of actuality and because the function of editing is believed to be the mainspring of film creation, it has so far been found that the best material for documentary purpose is naturally, and not artificially, contrived.

But it would be a grave mistake to assume that the documentary method differs from story-film merely in its preference for natural material. That would imply that natural material alone gives the distinction, which is untrue. To state that only documentary makes use of analytical editing methods is equally mistaken. At least one leading exponent of the documentary tradition (Flaherty) was creating the living scene in film before the scientific experiments of the Russians became common knowledge, while the latter have applied their methods of technique to many purely fictional films. To postulate that documentary is

<sup>1</sup> 'The basis of all documentary, instructional and propaganda films is fundamentally the same as that of the news-reel. Truth.' *Kinematograph Weekly*, 25 October, 1934.

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realistic as opposed to the romanticism of the story-film, with its theatrical associations, is again incorrect; for although documentary may be realistic in its concern with actuality, realism applies not only to the material but more especially to the method of approach to that material.

Such inspirations as I suggest are the essential aims of documentary demand a sense of social responsibility difficult to maintain in our world today. That I am fully prepared to admit. But, at the same time, your documentary director dare not be neutral, or else he becomes merely descriptive and factual.

The function that the film performs within the present social and political sphere, as indicated in our first chapter, must be kept constantly in mind. Relative freedom of expression for the views of the documentarist will obviously vary with the production forces he serves and the political system in power. In countries still maintaining a parliamentary system, discussion and projection of his beliefs within certain limits will be permitted only so long as they do not seriously oppose powerful vested interests, which most often happen to be the forces controlling production. Under an authoritarian system, freedom is permissible provided his opinions are in accord with those of the State for social and political advance, until presumably such a time shall arrive when the foundations of the State are strong enough to withstand criticism. Ultimately, of course, you will appreciate that you can neither make films on themes of your own choice, nor apply treatments to accepted themes, unless they are in sympathy with the aims of the dominant system.

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IV  
DOCUMENTARY IN THE MAKING

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## IV

### DOCUMENTARY IN THE MAKING

The progress of documentary has inevitably been disturbing, continually causing us to alter our opinions and often to change the nature of our approach to themes and natural material. Documentary is so closely related to current thought and activities that this continual change of interpretation, necessitating as it does a frequent re-orientation of theory, is an important factor which must not be overlooked in criticism. For this reason we cannot expect to lay down in these notes any academic, rule-of-thumb principles of technique. Each producer and each director is working out his or her own theory, each is discovering and developing his or her particular style, which in themselves will change according to the broader expansion of general principles. But we can, perhaps, touch upon certain aspects of technique and production which would appear common to most documentaries today because, by a simple discussion of these, we may acquire a wider knowledge of the documentary method.

From what we have discussed of its evolution and elementary principles, it can be seen that the sphere of documentary offers the whole living world from which to select subjects and material, a wealth of perplexities and understandings and relationships to bring to the screen. We can appreciate, moreover, from a creative point of view why the film director, seeking something more purposeful and virile to express than a story handed to him by a department, turns to documentary for his outlet. Why the experimentalist, seeking the means with which to experiment, concentrates on the documentary and propaganda approach to cinema rather than on the artificial attitude of the studios which bears little or no relation to modern life. And because the ends of publicity and education are wider and, at times, more visionary than the hard cash demands of entertainment, your documentary maker would appear to be more free than if he were engaged in the factory routine of the studio. At least he can recognise that documentary could be used to interpret the contemporary struggle in cultural, economic and political issues of modern

existence, to portray present relationships, and thus be put to greater purpose than illustrating stories about a world which does not exist. Documentary may indeed be more humble, but its roots grow in a solid foundation.

At the same time, it must by now be very clear that documentary demands new methods of construction, new ideas of production and a complete new set of critical standards distinct from those governing the story-film. More important, it demands a completely *new attitude* towards cinema, an attitude that until now has not been manifest in the development of cinema along accepted commercial lines.

We may, then, pass on to a fuller examination of this attitude and concern ourselves with the materials and technical means that are at the disposal of the documentarist for the expression of such an attitude.

Any technical discussion, however, should be prefaced by an emphasis on the difference that exists between the documentary film and its relation to the spectator in the audience and that of the story-film, although in many cases the two types of film appear next to each other in the same programme.

Documentary is not concerned with what is usually called 'a plot', meaning a sequence of fictional events revolving round imaginary individuals and the situations that develop from their behaviour. Rather is it concerned with a theme, which in turn is expressive of a definite purpose, thus demanding from an audience an attention quite different from that of a fictional story. In the latter, the reaction of the spectator lies in the projection of his or her character and personality into those of the actors playing in the story and the ultimate result of a series of fictional complications. The individual incidents and emotions are more important than anything else. Years of cinema-going, moreover, have taught the audience almost exactly what to expect in the entertainment film. Stories and characters have become so stereotyped that their essential ingredients may be counted on the fingers of your two hands. Instead of developing the story to imaginative ends, commercial cinema has placed most of its faith in the star-system, which serves as an efficient disguise for the avoidance of subjects bearing a relation to actuality and offers ample opportunity for the exploitation of sex stimuli which has been found so profitable among repressed bourgeois societies.

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Documentary today presents an exactly opposite appeal. It has no individualised story, no much-publicised star and none of the rich trappings and expensive flim-flams of the story-film. That is why the renters say they cannot sell it. Documentary relies exclusively on the belief that there is nothing so interesting to ourselves as ourselves. It depends on the individual's interest in the world around him. It bases its appeal on the community's undeniable zest for getting about the world and, more difficult, on the drama of events that lies at one's own doorstep. If there are human beings, they are secondary to the main theme. Their private passions and petulances are of little interest. For the most part they perform their natural behaviour as in normal life. The dramatisation and characterisation lie not in their hands but in the method of the director. They are types selected from the many, portraying the mind and character of this or that social group. If there are spectacular scenes, they again are only present because they are typical and because they develop naturally from the subject, such as the climax of *Man of Aran*, the Buddha sequence in *Song of Ceylon*, the storm in *Weather Forecast* and the coming to the surface in *Coal Face*. Documentary has always a specific purpose to fulfil and it is that purpose which is intended to be of first interest to the spectator.

After watching documentaries being shown to audiences of the most conflicting types in various parts of Britain, it is my experience that your audience gives greater attention to documentary than to story-film. Fleeting emotions and transient good looks are quickly forgotten but issues of wide significance have a habit of sticking in the mind. In watching documentary, the audience is continually noting distinctions and analysing situations and probing the 'why' and 'wherefore'. For this reason, you will observe that an audience will see and respond to a documentary film more than once, whereas a story-film must be exceptionally good to command a revival. Not only this, but the absence of plot and stars compels the audience to be more sensitive to the methods of presentation. Poor photography, bad editing and unimaginative sound immediately become apparent, whereas in a story-film the thrill of the situation itself will often compensate for inadequate technical treatment. This is not to suggest that the audience is, or should be, interested in technique as such, for that would be wholly defeating the purposeful ends of documentary, but that the nature of documentary is such that, unless the

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technique is good, its faults are more noticeable than in the story-film where there are other factors to absorb the attention.

Without good craftsmanship, propaganda would clearly never attain its ends. Without sincerity and clarity, documentary would fail in its purpose of holding the audience. On the other hand, technique must never be permitted to play the most important part in documentary. Subject and theme must always come first. It is only for their full and lasting expression that good craftsmanship is necessary. Criticism of documentary departs from criticism of story-films not in its disregard of craftsmanship, but in its stress upon the purpose which that craftsmanship should serve.

The subjects of documentary must be presented as clearly and concisely as possible. Every point in the argument must be capable of being quickly grasped and lead straight on to its successor, or else the audience will lose the thread of the theme. The co-ordination of sight and sound must be without any possibilities of confusion. For this reason, it is my contention that documentary should be short, not longer than three or four reels at the most, within which footage a great deal can be said with force and lasting impression. In this present age of speed, there is no time for laboured argument. Thirty minutes is a long time to ask for the undivided attention of a cinema audience.

Most documentaries are conceived in broad dimensions of a full-blooded feature picture; but most documentaries grow shorter as the film begins to take shape. No matter the bigness of the subject or width of location, documentary must tell its message without elaboration or repetition. Directness of expression alone will permit implications to be drawn and conclusions to be reached. Many subjects have the habit of presenting a dozen good-looking facets, offshoots of the major theme. It is pursuance of these that so often leads to overlength and consequent dullness; to sequences grand enough in themselves but incidental to the main march of the theme. This, I feel, was one of the mistakes made in the film *B.B.C.: The Voice of Britain*, probably because of the large scope of the subject.

Shortness of footage is nothing of which the documentarist need be ashamed. Two reels of documentary, straight to the point and powerfully said, are worth a dozen feature pictures of labouring insignificance. Thirty odd minutes of deliberate concentration from a modern audience is worth a week of leisurely contempla-



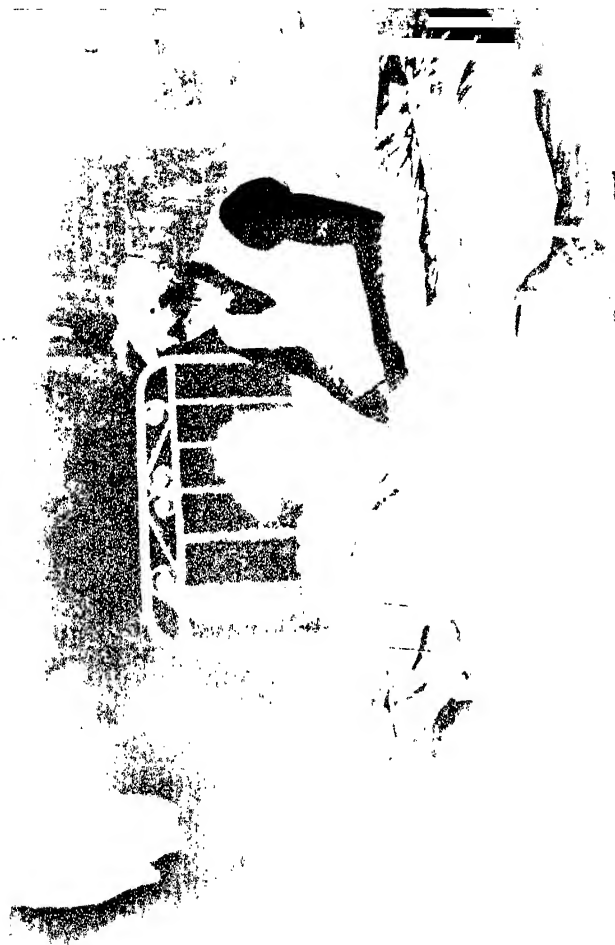
SHIPYARD (British 1934-35)

G.-B. Instructional: *directed by* PAUL ROTH



HOUSING PROBLEMS (British 1935)

British Commercial Gas Association: *directed by* EDGAR ANSTEV and  
ARTHUR ELTON



THE BORINAGE (Belgian 1933)

E.P.I.: *directed by* JORIS IVENS and HENRI STORCK

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tion. And with the persuasive force of good technique to hand, with sight and sound to bring alive the modern world, more can be said in half an hour than any documentary maker has so far had to say.

At an earlier stage, some mention has been made of the position of the individual artist in the cinema. It was suggested that, while economic issues underlying the amusement film have reduced the individual mind to what amounts to a cog in the machine, documentary offers very considerable opportunities for the expression of the individual artist's outlook. This, however, is not wholly true.

Social documentary deals with issues and subjects upon which no single individual is qualified to make statements or draw conclusions without expert collaboration. The scope of propaganda, especially if directed to political or social ends, is so wide that it would be indiscreet as well as impracticable to permit the individual artist to dictate his own theme and its treatment. The more we investigate documentary as a propagandist weapon, the more shall we realise that the question of theme and subject is, just as in story-film, a matter for general discussion; but that the actual interpretation in terms of cinema is a matter for the individual artist working, not alone, but in cooperation with other artists. In other words, I am suggesting that documentary, like story-film, should be the result of collective working but that unlike the story-film, co-operation should be directed to a common end and not riddled with rivalry born of personal advancement. This, I believe, can only be possible if there is a common social purpose to be achieved. Maybe it is satisfactory for your sentimentalist director to sojourn in his island, secure in splendid isolation, so long as he is content to treat themes removed from significant contemporary importance. But the documentarist working on the home front, expressing aspects of social and economic problems that often concern a whole community, must look outside his own mind if his work is to be of any value.

In this connection it will be remembered that after the success of *Drifters*, both from a propagandist and an economic point of view, Grierson made the point that the establishment of the E.M.B. Film Unit as a propagandist body depended not on the making of one film by one director at a time, but upon being able to make half a dozen films by half a dozen directors working in co-operation with each other. And by selecting and training personnel with complementary talents, by persuading artists to

work co-operatively instead of competitively, Grierson has succeeded in his object.

This whole question of collective working is, I feel, extremely important to the future development of any production based on propaganda. I personally should be a great deal happier about the progress of documentary in this country if I saw a move towards the establishment of Units rather than the isolated success of an occasional one-man picture. Before that can be possible, however, not only have economic bases for such Units to be forthcoming, but there must be found persons who are qualified to assume the difficult tasks of producer.

### (i) *The Function of the Producer*

In documentary, the activities and abilities of a producer are unquestionably wider than those of a director. At first glance, possibly, his duty would seem to be concerned principally with the difficult task of equating business interests with creative production. In practice, the responsibilities lie deeper. Again at a first consideration, the actual technical creator of films would appear to be the man who really matters. But, in point of fact, it is the producer who controls the development of several directors and several productions working to a general theory that is the big mind of documentary production. I make this distinction between producer and director with emphasis because their difference and relationship will be closely bound up with future developments.

Often enough, your producer is himself something of an artist, a theorist who is happy to see his ideas put into concrete form by capable directors and cameramen. But, more often, your producer is serving only the hard ends of profit and consequently feels it his authority to suppress the creative endeavour of his directors in the supposed gain to the balance sheet. In such cases a director can have little respect for his producer, a situation that can in the long run end only in abortive production. The needs of documentary are such that there must be, at the least, a sympathetic co-operation between producer and director; or else the one abuses his authoritative status while the other resorts to craft neither of which can aid the already complex process of documentary production.

Naturally your producer must be familiar with all sides of

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practical production. In the most satisfactory cases, he has arrived at his job through previous experience as a director. Because, if he is unappreciative of the actual problems of production, he will be unfitted either to select the right directors for the right films or to analyse their respective and many indiscretions. As our practical estimate proceeds, it will be more clearly seen that the pitfalls confronting the documentary director are numerous. In the light of his wider experience, it is the job of the producer to put his finger on this or that weakness during actual production, as well as in the preliminary stages of scriptwork and during the final pulling together of a film, yet at the same time not to abuse the creative freedom of his directors. Through his sympathetic understanding of what they are trying to do, he must be able to check their divergences without interfering with their freedom and convictions. There is neither aesthetic nor economic sense in giving a director a free hand for nine months and then, in half an hour, attacking the results, as has happened in commercially organised documentary. That is both unfair to the director and failing to meet the requirements of honest film production.

As in every other aspect of documentary, the capabilities of the producer need to be quite different from those of the story-film producer, not only because the whole method of production is different but primarily because the ends to be served demand a new outlook. The activities of the studio producer are, for the most part, quite neatly decided by the appearance of the balance sheet. His whole regard for the directors and technicians working under him is governed, quite simply, by money-making and precedent. But your documentary producer is meeting the requirements of bodies or persons who have wider purpose to serve than immediate financial returns. Propaganda and education cannot, fortunately, be summed up in terms of hard cash. Not only have immediate effects to be taken into consideration but, more importantly, the effects of propaganda over a considerable period of time must be reckoned with. Story-films hit or miss within a few months of their production. Documentary, in its only sensible form, extends over a period of years—in theatre, classroom and village hall—and its value cannot be immediately assessed. For this obvious reason, the position of the documentary producer is full of responsibility—to his sponsors, to education, to his directors and, last but not least, to his own social conscience.

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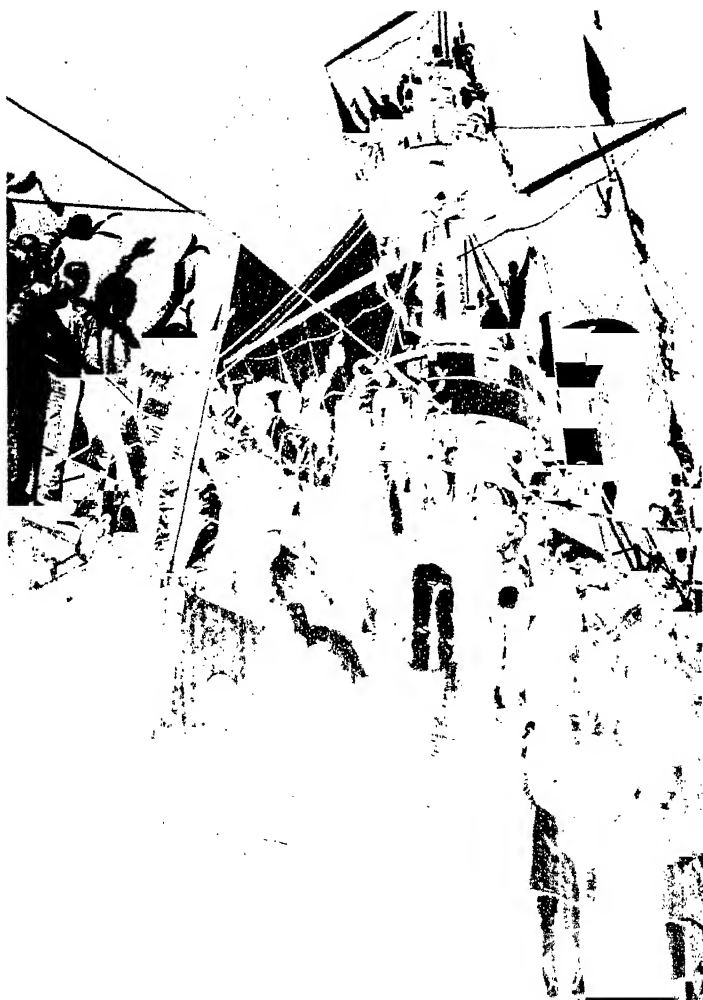
Moreover, the subjects and themes of documentary are not the ephemeral and sensational entertainment of the story-film. On the contrary, the material from which documentary is made, as we have already seen, may often be dull and uninspiring. In many cases, where there is no chance of exciting climax or thrilling tempos, the director will often reach a point of revulsion, not of disinterest but of positive dislike for his material. It is then that the producer fulfils one of his most valuable functions: to keep the director at his problem until the moment of enlightenment arrives. It is, as Grierson has pointed out, the sponsors of documentary—the educationalists, the industrialists and the politicians—who really control the destiny of documentary and who make possible the practical work of its directors. And it falls to the lot of the producer to balance one with another.

Relations between producer and director we have already mentioned. But let us make it clear that it is the function of the producer to *develop* as well as to guide and control the directors employed by him. Sympathy and understanding are elementary essentials: beyond them must lie confidence enough to allow a director time and footage with his subject and patience during production. These are fundamental requirements. Too often do we see documentaries mutilated by insistence on speed (to meet profit demands) and directors discouraged by last minute interference about matters upon which agreement should have been reached at outset.

Lastly, there is this question of the importance of theory and discussion. Documentary is, as we have seen, a fairly new development of cinema: new in that it demands a fresh attitude, not only towards technical apparatus and craftsmanship, but towards purposes in view and results to be obtained.

Theory, then, and its requisite, experiment, is vital to documentary progress and it is in your producer, I believe, that theory should principally reside; to be practised, rightly or wrongly, by the directors and technicians for whose work he is in so many ways responsible.

For the producer, in his status of keeping a general control over production, is in a more advantageous position to theorise than the director, who is absorbed with the immediate problems of the job in hand. Not only this, but there comes a time in film making when, I think, the excitement of going out with a camera or assembling your film strips on the cutting-bench begins to fade.



BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN (Soviet 1925)

Goskino: *directed by* SERGEI EISENSTEIN



MOTHER (Soviet 1926)  
Mejrabpomfilm: *directed by* V. I. PUDOVKIN

There comes a moment (it may be only transitional) when you become more interested in the first working out of a problem and the theories which it involves than in the carrying out of the actual work itself. Eisenstein, so report goes, since his tragic experience in Mexico, has found more interest in creating within his mind the working out of a film than in the production itself, with the result that after the scenario has been written and the film planned, he has no enthusiasm to put his ideas on to celluloid. Over the last year or two he has done immensely interesting work in his G.I.K. lectures, for which much research has been necessary, and we may perhaps consider the point that his work as instructor and investigator has been more valuable to cinema than if he had continued production.

We must also remember in this connection that it was not until some years after their making that Eisenstein realised the theoretical importance of his experiments in *Strike* and *Potemkin*. I think I am right in saying that it was not until his visit to Europe and America that he really studied Marx; and I am quite sure that the significance of the theories of movement and conflict, which were demonstrated practically in *Potemkin* and *October*, were not realised until a much later date when Eisenstein became more concerned with theory than with practice.

In many ways the case of Grierson is similar. *Drifters* was made almost impulsively, carrying out certain preconceived theories of documentary, but I doubt if Grierson appreciated the full value of his experiment while he was making the film. I am not now referring to economic means of production but to aesthetic and technical elements. It is probable that the real significance of the 'creative treatment of actuality' in *Drifters* was not apparent until Grierson turned producer and began his important work of creating a school of documentary. Today, for example, he is at his best when viewing and discussing some director's 'rushes' in the theatre, during which he will touch on and afterwards expand half a dozen lines of thought provoked by the raw material on the screen.

As yet no one else in documentary has attempted this difficult but all-important task of producer-teacher, but we find some indications of a similar tendency arising in the amusement cinema. Both Lubitsch and Disney have progressed from the status of directors to that of producers, controlling a unit of technicians under their theory and guidance. Results of the

Lubitsch-Paramount experiment are yet to be seen, but there can be no doubt as to the success of the Disney methods of production. It would not be fair to conclude these remarks on the importance of the producer without mention of Erich Pommer, although his skill and patience are too widely known as being the real genius behind the great years of the German cinema for further elaboration.<sup>1</sup>

## (ii) *The Function of the Director*

### A. VISUAL

#### (i) *The Film Strip*

Not without reason is the motion-picture screen shaped like a picture postcard. Nor is it really strange that so many makers of films still regard the images out of which the visuals of a film are made as a series of views. Elsewhere, we have mentioned that the medium of creative cinema may be understood from two widely different points of view. Here, in our exploration of practice, we may amplify our original analysis because it is partly upon this division of opinion as to the use of the fundamental materials of cinema that there rests the difference between story and documentary film technique.

Expressed crudely, a film is in actuality a series of views placed one after (below) another on a screen in such a manner that the spectator may, with the aid of reproduced sound and speech, grasp the meaning not only of one view but of the whole collection as they succeed each other at a speed of twenty-four to the second. The mechanical apparatus of film making—cameras, microphones and the rest—will ensure a reasonably faithful record to be made both aurally and visually of objects or persons placed before it for reproduction. But it is also obvious that there is nothing creative in so using the instruments of cinema. There is nothing particularly satisfying in being able to reproduce photographically and aurally a straightforward scene, whether it be of everyday life or artificially contrived in a studio built for the purpose. If cinema is to be used imaginatively, its instruments must be manipulated with a creative method in view. The scenes

<sup>1</sup> It is significant that the strength of British documentary up till its post-war decline lay in its development of producers and units, whereas the weakness of the British feature film has been its scarcity of producers with imagination, foresight and a practical experience of film-making.

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which it reproduces must be something more than mere reproductions, no matter even if the material chosen for reproduction has been creatively arranged. There must be creation *in the very act of using* the mechanical apparatus, so that the representation before the audience can be 'made to live'.

The process of film making, or creation, is more complex than mere reproduction, although the story-films of today would hardly confirm this fact. A director assembles and selects in terms of his medium various creative forces and preferences incited by almost every part of his being. At one and the same time he considers his theme and his actors, his special approach and his innumerable angles of vision, his lighting and his changing shapes of composition; he imagines his sounds and the speed of his movements, visualises the assembling and contemplates the eventual effect on the screen. All these distinct but closely related ideas and materials are arranged, developed, suspended, dispersed and brought together again—gradually becoming fused into a unified film under the will of the director and the guidance of his producer. And in the successful film, these elements are closely interwoven, so that the unity achieved by their fusion is of greater value than simply their sum.

Any collaboration of a reasonably skilled photographer and a sound-recordist can relate the material physical facts about an object or person simply by showing them on the screen with their synchronised sound. That is the basis of the travel picture and the news-reel. To reveal their objective meaning and essential reasons for existence, to relate them to broad references and make their presence significant, demands a sensibility and conscience that are found only in the creative director.

To use the familiar axiom of the painter Delacroix, nature is only a dictionary to the artist. The documentarist goes to nature, or actuality, for his visual and aural imagery in the same way that a writer goes to a dictionary for the proper sense and spelling of a word. But just as a dictionary is not a great work of literature, neither is a series of photographic views (however lovely in themselves), nor a chain of recorded sounds of natural objects and persons projected on a screen and through a loudspeaker, a documentary film. It is the reason underlying the choice of natural material, and the purpose which is in mind for bringing it to life on the screen—that really constitute film creation.

Documentary involves everything in life that has emotional

and intellectual value. It is the task of the director to select persons, events and objects from the cross-section of the world at large and to dramatise them—to draw out their emotional value and to put them on the isolated screen-area in the darkened theatre to interpret his purpose. There is little within reason and little within the limits of censorship that documentary cannot bring before an audience to state an argument. Each image and sound of the many from which the film is composed is a realisation of a fragment of life.

Technically, the success of a film as a unified work depends upon its final cohesion in the minds of the audience. Although the film director works in terms of fragments of sound and picture, he must always consider of greater importance the effect of their sum. On the other hand, he must be certain that there is a definite concentration of vision in every shot he takes and a definite focus of sound in every noise he records. Whether moving or static, each image must be dynamic in its attack on the senses of the observer. It must arrest the attention of the most lethargic spectator, appeal to and infect that unconscious response to emotion which is present to some degree in every human being.

Actually, the process of reception by an audience is swifter than description implies. Our reaction to a single visual image, or the combined effect of a series of visual images, is practically instantaneous. The effect on our minds has taken place almost before we are aware of the image on the screen. The process is emotional. But it ceases to be such the moment we form a distinct idea of it, giving way to the meaning of the shot, or shots, which is always last to arrive in our perception. For this purpose the characteristic mechanics of the medium, with its swiftly changing visual images of conflict, achieves perhaps a greater purity of mind for audience reception than any other medium of expression.

Proceeding from analysis of sequence to analysis of a single shot, the whole illusion of movement in a strip of film lies in the fact that two static visual images, the second printed below the first on a band of moving celluloid, follow one another in juxtaposition: the relation of the one to the next causing us to believe that we are seeing a single movement. This very simple act, performed with remarkable accuracy by the machinery of cinema (camera, printer and projector), is the beginning of all investigation into the technique of cinematography.

(ii) *Movement and Symphonics*

From an aesthetic and technical point of view, movement is the most important of all elements contained in film creation. The capacity for movement of the subject-material being filmed, the mechanical movements of the camera and of the celluloid itself, are fundamental characteristics of the film medium. Movement of context, movement of continuity, they are vital requirements to the expression of a theme by the film medium, without which adequate interpretation would be impossible. The composition of film strips from which a complete film is made up, frame after frame, shot after shot, produces nothing but an illusion of movement. It is, in fact, a process based upon a series of conflicts which, by juxtaposition, results in an *appearance* of movement from something which, in reality, is completely static. Frame to frame, shot to shot, sequence to sequence, the interpretation is purely a matter of movements meeting and arising from the intrinsic structure of the medium.

Movement, in all its many forms, is the element in cinema that most creates feeling on the part of the audience. Almost every degree of human emotion and reaction may be provoked, both mentally and physically, by the appearance of movement. Thus, I feel, some study of movement and its relation to the film will play an important part in giving to documentary those emotions of which I have deplored the absence.

Expressive movement, in itself, is life; and sensation, interpreted through speech and gesture, is an expression of movement. The relation between words and gestures is of paramount importance because it involves the whole question of human portrayal on the screen, a problem which we have already discussed and to which we shall return later. The one arises naturally from the other or, on occasions, both are simultaneous. Observation will reveal, I think, that it is really a matter of personal character. But, from a filmic point of view, it is the gesture which is of principal interest, both in itself as an expression of feeling and in relation to its context. We are all aware of the part played by mime in the silent film; of the heavy, mannered style of symbolic acting developed by the Germans and the immense value placed by Chaplin on pantomime. We may remember also, the Pudovkin experiments with spoken titles inserted, not at their moment of utterance, but at the emotional peak of the situation. In the

theatre your actor creates an impression of emotion very largely through gesture, and the audience, child-like, will imitate the emotions thus indicated. In cinema, the same principle is used but it is expanded from actors to events, seeking to express intellectual argument, not only through the mouthpiece of characters, but through the events in which they participate.

In the film, the scope of its technical qualities and the inherent characteristics of the medium itself make perfectly possible the removal of the individual actor. The audience may still be emotionally influenced by the rhythmic movements of the event. For from events, whether improvised or natural, there spring rhythms governed by the significant meaning of the situations. It is by interpreting these rhythms on the screen that the film director can best emotionally disturb the audience. The process of movement and its rhythms may sometimes even become the context of the film, as with the Continental Realists. Therein lies, I suggest, one of the fundamental distinctions between theatre and cinema. And it is the study of these movements and their utilisation for the interpretation of social relationships that constitutes one of the first problems confronting the documentarist, upon which he must spend much time and thought.

Probably the best-known example of movement expressing the context of a scene is the famous Odessa Steps sequence in *Potemkin*, a scene that appears to create a remarkable response from audiences of the most varied kind. In Eisenstein's own analysis of the sequence (made at a later date than the film) he attributes the whole emotional response of the audience to the comparative rhythms of the event; to the steady machine-rhythm of the advancing line of troops being thrown into conflict with the scattered crowd before it, with the broken rhythm of the perambulator isolated as a clue, a prominent rhythm in itself, to the whole conflict. He has invited comparison between the emotions aroused by this scene and the emotions provoked by the performance of an actor like Jannings, thereby indicating the fundamental distinctions that exists between the cinematic and the theatrical methods of stimulating emotion.

The *Potemkin* incident was, of course, admirably suited in every respect for portrayal by this method of comparative rhythms. Not all documentary subjects contain the same material for sensational event. At the same time, it is the rhythm, or rhythms, of the event that constitute the primary factors by which the

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documentarist will arouse the emotions of his audience. It is for these that he must search when analysing his subject. The important issue arising from the Odessa Steps scene is that emotional response of a very powerful kind can be provoked without the performance of individual actors; that the rhythms of an event can, if put together in such a way, express an attitude.

But, and here exists the danger of misusing the employment of rhythms to interpret an event, the movement within a certain sequence must always be considered in relation to the meaning it reveals and can never, except in the pseudo-realist documentary, be used for its own effect. Movement is not only connected with the material within the scene but with the movement of the context, by which may be understood literary movement. The Continental Realists, as we have seen, were almost wholly occupied with the representation of movement *as movement*. In every case they failed to appreciate that there was a meaning underlying their rhythms quite separate from their aesthetic appeal. They were meant, these *Berlins*, to be concerned with a superficial rendering of movement as an idea. In aesthetic contemplation it was forgotten that their rhythms stood as symbols of an epoch and that there is no real value in movement itself. They shot, these aesthetes, the rhythms of a rotary-press or the parade of a milk-bottling machine and rested content with the visual effects of movement. They did not, for a moment, realise that these repetitive rhythms, beautiful to watch in themselves, raised important materialist issues of the man at the machine, of the social and economic problems lying behind modern machinery and transport.

Not until we come to such an approach as Wright's in his West Indian pictures do we find the symphonic treatment of movement bent to a definite purpose. The banana loading in *Cargo from Jamaica* and the sugar-cane cutting in *Windmill in Barbados* were both shot and cut in terms of movement and rhythms. But there arose from that symphonic treatment a sociological meaning—a comment upon the exploitation of coloured labour by Western capitalism which invited a more profound consideration than the pseudo-realist approach of the *Berlin* school. And it is this deeper use of the symphonic method that prompts us to consider it divorced from its early applications, that is to say put to a sociological or other propagandist purpose and not using it merely as an end in itself.

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The symphonic form is based upon the predetermined arrangement, or orchestration, of movement. Film is conceived as an uninterrupted flow of movement; incidents and crises and happenings arising from the action being enveloped into the unbroken flow of continuity. And, as in the case cited from *Potemkin*, it incorporates all kinds of cross or comparative movements in its stride, building not only from sympathetically related movements but also from conflicts and opposing movements. It embraces a movement, or series of movements, for each sequence developing from its theme; but it must be emphasised that these movements arise from the material and are not a superimposed framework deliberately laid on to the material. Rather do they result from, and are made to convey, a definite attitude to the subject; and it is this attitude and its expression which are of the greatest interest to the documentary method.

Two motives, moreover, underlie movement: purpose and material weight. It is these that give rise to a second kind of symphonic form, as distinct from that described above. A form that incorporates dramatic issues which are arrived at through the tensions arising from the meeting of conflicts. All the energies and reactions contained within movements are caught and, through technical means, made the mainspring of the movement, thus introducing the familiar elements of drama—suspense and climax—into the symphonic form. And, as with our first or musical method, it is the overtone arising from the clash of movements and from the interpolation, at given points, of clues to the energies concerned, that leads you to understand the director's attitude to his material, that defines the purpose underlying the documentary approach, that gives the film meaning beyond pure description.

Grierson gives a useful example of this approach from his film *Granton Trawler*:

'The trawler is working its gear in a storm. The tension elements are built up with emphasis on the drag of the water, the heavy lurching of the ship, the fevered flashing of birds, the fevered flashing of faces between wave lurches and spray. The trawl is hauled aboard with strain of men and tackle and water. It is opened in a release which comprises equally the release of men, birds and fish. There is no pause in the flow of movement, but something of an effort as between two opposing forces has

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been recorded. In a more ambitious and deeper description the tension might have included elements more intimately and more heavily descriptive of the clanging weight of the tackle, the strain on the ship, the operation of the gear under water and along the ground, the scuttering myriads of birds laying off in the gale. The fine fury of ship and heavy weather could have been brought through to touch the vitals of the men and the ship. In the hauling, the simple fact of a wave breaking over the men, subsiding, and leaving them hanging on as though nothing had happened, would have brought the sequence to an appropriate peak. The release could have attached to itself images of, say, birds wheeling high, taking off from the ship, and of contemplative, i.e. more intimate, reaction on the faces of the men. The drama would have gone deeper by the greater insight into the energies and reactions involved.<sup>1</sup>

The main differences between this method of approach and that of the purely musical method, as well exemplified in Wright's work, are too obvious to require explanation. That is not to say that the one is superior to the other. It is a matter of the director's personal feeling towards his material, offset by the purpose which his picture is meant to serve.

To these we may add a third element of symphonic form, the introduction of poetic images from which atmosphere and mood may arise. In this approach, there is description but without tension or dramatic suspense. Instead there is what we may call a poetic imagery, manifesting itself in symbolic reference to, usually, a natural association of ideas. This was, I imagine, the method of symphonic form which Eisenstein intended using in *Que Viva Mexico*, as a development of the creation of mood from poetic images with which he experimented in *Romance Sentimentale*. Both Machaty and Dovjenko are also exponents of the imagist method; the former in his concluding sequence to *Ekstase* and the latter in *Ivan*. It is a method that pursues the creation of mood from rhythms, as in the musical form, but gives the mood a fullness of illumination by reference to attendant poetic images, at once contemplative and literary in quality. It takes a common event and enlarges upon the actual happening by a wide reference to its many associations, human and otherwise. It brings the element of poetry, by visual and aural image, to illuminate the commonplace. And it is this integration of

<sup>1</sup> 'The Symphonic Film', John Grierson, *Cinema Quarterly*, vol. ii, no. 3.

images with movement that creates the hang-over impression when the film is past and done.

All of these forms may appear in the same film, their use being entirely dependent on the outlook and particular characteristics of the director. They are important here, in our brief analysis of movement, because, as I have tried to make clear, it is the over-tonal element arising from their use that, together with symbolism and irony, gives expression to the director's attitude. All three manipulations of movement and tempo, in close relation to the handling of camera and sound, arrive at their richest use in the dialectic treatment of a theme; upon which, in fact, as we shall see later, they really depend.

It will, I hope, be grasped from these comments that the analysis and interpretation of movement, in all its forms, to express theme and attitude constitute perhaps the most easily recognisable difference between documentary and the ordinary descriptive film of natural material. Their presence in a film, either separately or together, indicates at least that the director is working with a creative understanding of his medium, and not merely relying on the machinery of cinema, assisted by good photography and realistic sound, to record actual fact.

### (iii) *Natural Material*

(a) *The Actor: Natural and Professional.* The problem of film acting and the place of the professionally trained actor in the cinema is not peculiar to the story-film. What we mean by 'acting' is, in fact, closely bound up with the whole principles of the documentary method and is providing a most difficult problem for the documentarist. The relationship of man to the society in which he moves is one of the fundamental perplexities of documentary. It is more. It is one of the most vital problems of modern civilisation and is occupying the attention of every thinking person today.

Opinions differ so widely on the problem of whether acting is an inherent part of film creation and, if so, in what lies the difference between stage and screen acting, that we should do well to try to analyse their essential distinctions. We should realise, however, that the immaturity of the cinema renders any but its elementary principles open to contradiction, whereas the traditions and conventions of the theatre lie deep-rooted in years of precedent. There is, you can safely say, some fixed opinion as to what

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does, and what does not, constitute 'good' acting on the stage today, that is within the orthodox limits of the stage as generally accepted by its critics. And since most Western story-films still rely on the transference, or rather the adaptation, of the theatre style to film technique, we may assume that the majority of so-called actors of the cinema are judged according to standards derived originally from the stage. That is to say, they set out to achieve the same end of characterisation although the methods employed are slightly different. The one must make allowance for the mechanical reproduction of the cinema apparatus; the other must rely upon the illusion that is the basis of the theatre medium.

Now, in the theatre, the stage upon which an actor performs has a real existence and definite spatial dimensions. In order to pass from one side to the other, your actor must walk that distance in so many steps in a given period of time. Separated from the stage by a definite space, at varying distances and varying eye-levels, there sits the audience. Thus it is clear that any speech or gesture on the part of the actor on the stage must be capable of travelling across the intervening gap, so as to be comprehensible both aurally and visually to the audience. This can only be achieved by a deliberate emphasis on the part of the actor. So much is obvious.

Such limitations naturally lead to a peculiar technique being adopted by the stage actor. He cannot behave as in real life. If he whispers, he must whisper loudly, so that the audience at the back of the theatre may hear. Unless he employs certain forms of word enunciation, the greater part of the audience will be unable to hear what he says. Unless he exaggerates his facial expressions and uses grease-paint to heighten his features, the audience will not notice the change in his facial movements, let alone understand the meaning which he is trying to convey across the intervening space.

The stage actor, then, quite apart from the other factors of theatrecraft, has to learn special methods of speaking and possess a special knowledge of exaggerated gesture before he can undertake to represent a fictitious character to an audience.

Further, the aim of the theatre is to perform a play as many times to as large an audience as wishes to see the piece. In other words, not one but many performances are necessary of a successful play in order to satisfy the potential audience. So that the actor has not only to learn the tricks of his technique for one

demonstration of a particular character, but he must be able to adopt this unnatural and artificial behaviour on many occasions. He must repeat his tricks over and over again and still appear fresh until the public is tired. He must be able to cut himself off abruptly from his normal everyday existence and to assume the mind, behaviour, feelings and often the physical appearance of an imaginary person. To do this demands great skill, for in each of these manifestations he must rely almost entirely upon himself. Artificial lighting and stage-effects are there to help him, but at base the success of the portrayal lies in his own ability.

When we come to examine the screen, however, we find a wholly different state of affairs. Firstly, because the nature of film is an illusion of movement created by passing a celluloid band of images through a projector, it is clear that the actor's movements are not governed by actual time or confined within real space. We may see him begin to walk across a room and then pick him up on the other side, thereby deliberately eliminating a portion of space and time. Secondly, the capability of the camera for isolating comprehensive views, near views, close-ups, etc., at once destroys the significance of the distance between screen and audience. That distance still exists, but the illusion of the constantly changing views unconsciously draws the audience first near to, and then perhaps far from, the object shown on the screen within the limit of a second or two. The movie-camera possesses the god-like vision of the remote and the minute. Should the actor desire a special movement of his hand to be observed by the audience, he has no need to emphasise it himself, as in the theatre, because the camera can isolate that single gesture and show it alone in a magnified size so that the audience cannot fail to grasp its meaning. But, and this is the important point, the emphasis no longer rests with the actor but with the camera.

Theoretically, the actor need employ no tricks or peculiar technique. He must remain natural, as in normal life, and the probing selectivity of the camera, under the director's control, will translate the meaning of his 'acting' to the audience. If necessary, his movements may be slowed down or made faster in order that attention may be drawn to them. Pudovkin will use slow-motion to show the beginning of a smile. And, in addition, the actor and his movements may be observed from almost any point of view.

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To continue, as in the theatre so in the cinema is it essential that the performance should be repeated many times. But the nature of the cinema is such that the multiplication is made by machinery. Theoretically, the actor's emotions need be expressed only once for registration on to negative, after which all else is purely a matter of mechanical processing. Thus his 'acting', if such it can still be called, may be both spontaneous and natural and even his most transient moments may be fixed on to celluloid for all practical time.

So much, then, for some of the elementary differences between stage and film performance.

But we must go further. By now it is familiar to most people that the underlying principles of filmcraft are based on the manipulation of the celluloid lengths which bear upon them the fragments of 'acting' performed by the actor. No matter how he has 'acted' in the studio, his representation on the screen is conditioned by the manner in which his fragments of 'acting' are pieced together. Other actors or inanimate objects, which may have no real relation to him and were not even within eyesight or earshot at the time of his studio performance, may be brought into relation to or contrast with him, thereby giving possibly an entirely new meaning to his gestures and expressions. In fact, his 'acting' really plays a very small part in the composition of the film when compared with the very important part that it would play in a stage performance. Whether he likes it or not, your actor is so much raw material. His very personality, so impressive perhaps on the stage, may be entirely altered by the process of editing.

As it happens, of course, such distortion of acting does not occur in most story-films today because, as has been pointed out earlier, the popular method of film production is a compromise between theatre and film. The fact that the camera is supposed to photograph what we really see—that it acts as a recorder—still conditions most film technique. Actors still 'act' in the theatrical manner before a turning camera and a sensitive microphone and their performance is transferred to the screen. Not until we reach documentary—which deals with real people in their natural environment—do we come up against the difficult problem of film creation, characterisation and the place of the individual in the theme. This is not to suggest that the theatrical method is either right or wrong in that branch of cinema which sets out to provide

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amusement in exchange for money. It simply implies that the film made with theatre acting, and with actors playing characters with which they have no connection in real life, is an extension of the stage rather than a development from within cinema itself.

On the other hand, we have already observed that one of the most serious shortcomings of the documentary film has been its continued evasion of the human being; and that the most difficult problem facing the documentarist today is the need for the characterisation of individuals in his films. The same problem has, quite naturally in view of its political and sociological implications, fully occupied the attention of the Soviet film technicians. From the first experiments of Eisenstein, with the transference of Commedia dell' Arte types into the types of his film *Strike* in 1923, up to the extremely lively discussions at the conference in Moscow<sup>1</sup> and the reception accorded the Vassilev Brothers' *Chapareo*, the story of Soviet cinema has been the story of the cinematic representation of the human being.

Eisenstein, at one time a pupil of Mayerhold, originally worked in the Proletcult Theatre which he turned into the theatre of acrobats. The traditional types and spontaneous acting methods of the Commedia dell' Arte had a curious fascination for him and, in particular, influenced three of his productions with which he toured the factories. In this industrial setting, he apparently realised the spatial limits of the stage and, deciding that the factory itself must find a means of expression, turned to the wider possibilities of cinema. This was, I gather, just about the same time as Kuleshov and Pudovkin were experimenting with the juxtaposition of film strips and first principles of montage.

From *Strike*, with its dozen or so typical characters, to *Potemkin* was a tremendous step. Expanding the idea of 'typage', Eisenstein set out to achieve 'not only a few faces but hundreds which should not *act* but be' and we get the birth of the mass film fulfilling the political requirements of the era. We get also, but not realised until much later, the importance of conflicting movements and in the Odessa Steps sequence the first indications that the rhythm of an event can be as emotionally powerful as the performance of an actor.

Pudovkin, on the other hand, was trying to express his themes through definite individuals, types drawn from and typical of the

<sup>1</sup> Moscow Film Festival, January 1935.

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mass, attempting a synthesis between professional and natural actors.

'Watching other *régisseurs* at work in those early days,' he wrote, 'I studied the difference between the actor's movements and gestures, while he was consciously acting for the camera, and his natural movements in reaction to various normal stimuli. I was attracted to analysing these natural movements, but even when I started work on *Mother* I wasn't clear why I found more dynamic material in the natural behaviour of the actor than in his conceived performance.

'Both Baranovskaia and Batalov, the mother and son of the film, were theatre artists with almost no experience of the cinema. With them I came face to face with the problems which were occupying my mind, but, being uncertain, I at first left them to themselves. The result was that effects which moved me in the theatre appeared to me in the studio as false and schematic.

'I began then to remove from the actor all that seemed to me to be exaggerated. I rooted out every attempt of the actor to show off his ability. I began to collaborate with him in finding the actual emotional state and, in addition, eliminating all unnecessary movement. I looked for those small details and shades of expression which are difficult to find, but which reflect the inner psychology of man. I took these subtle characteristics and fixed them on the film until I had a collection of human portraits. For the most part, these shots were motionless, or reproduced hardly noticeable movements.

'I gave these isolated portraits form, and a dynamic continuity by the process of montage. I found the way to build up a dialogue in which the transition of the actor from one emotional state to another (a change from glumness to a smile in response to a joke) had never taken place in actuality before the camera. I shot the actor at different times, glum and then smiling, and only on my editing table did these two separate moods co-ordinate with the third—the man who made the joke.'<sup>1</sup>

Eisenstein, however, continued with the theory of completely impersonal approach and finally entered the documentary field in *October*. It was the supreme example of a film without hero or plot, which, in the opinion of Dinamov, was a very dangerous theory. 'It was a number of events without definite characters.

<sup>1</sup> 'Acting—The Cinema v. the Theatre', V. I. Pudovkin, *The Criterion*, vol. xiii, no. 1.

Such material needs great talent to express but those pictures are not pictures of the mass. The mass must have its leaders. In *Potemkin* and *October* there was only a crowd.' Obviously it was this absence of emotion and lack of characterisation that made Eisenstein choose a central figure as a heroine in *The General Line*. But being apparently unable to grasp the social and economic issues of his subject, he sidetracked the whole thing with artificial trickeries of symbolism—his worst enemy. Eight years later we find him saying: 'The intellectual cinema—the vulgar definition of an intellectual film is a film without emotional feelings—is too vulgar to consider. *The General Line* was an intellectual film.'

Working down in the Ukraine, Dovjenko was meeting the same problems. Each of his films, *Zvenigora*, *Arsenal*, *Earth* and *Ivan*, reflected the same struggle. His sense of poetry, his philosophic acceptance of life and death, his passionate feeling for his own locality, all aided his evasion of important characterisation and his failure to express the major social issues of his material. The theme of *Ivan* was the building of Dnieperstroï and his idea the interpretation of the initial step in change from peasant to proletarian psychology. But, with one exception, the characters did not reflect the struggle for reconstruction and lacked biographical interest. As a result, the theme shifted away from the original psychological problem, and became concentrated instead in the glorious sequences of the slow-moving Dnieper and the dream world of smoke and steel and concrete out of which the Dam was slowly rising.

'Characters', says Dinamov, 'disappeared from our cinema because the directors did not *know* the people. They thought the film must be based upon the mass but the film without a hero was only an experiment. We need actors with great passions. Without actors we can do nothing. We cannot base our cinema on typage.'

Ermler and Yutkevich's *Counterplan* marked the beginning of a new period. Not only did it, for the first time, attempt to show the worker learning his job, but it also suggested that the professional actor might be an essential part of the cinema. It began to explore individual characterisation rather than continue with the methods of typage. It was the period not only of reconstruction but a period in which the individual was beginning to analyse his relations to the State. Consequently the workers in the cinema had to grasp fully this relationship before they could attempt characterisation. It is significant that Ermler studied two years



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OCTOBER (The Ten Days That Shook the World) (Soviet 1927-28)  
Sovkino: *directed by* SERGEI EISENSTEIN



NEW EARTH (Dutch 1931-34)

Capi: *directed by* JORIS IVENS

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at the Communist Academy before making *Counterplan*. Macharet's *Men and Jobs* went a step further than *Counterplan*, synthesising the professional actor with the natural type, and even enlisted comedy to present the psychological dilemma of the workers adjusting themselves to the efficiency of American engineering methods.

Pudovkin, during this time, still pursued the 'typage' theory and after making his first sound film, *Deserter*, over which he took two years, wrote:

'After much experimental and theoretical work I am convinced that it is possible to get excellent material for a picture from the ordinary man, taken straight from the street, who, never having acted before, is yet sensitive to the meaning of the experienced *régisseur*.

'In my last two pictures, *A Simple Case* and *Deserter*, it is with just such people I have worked. My problem is always by what means I am going to get these people, who are real human material, to express the right emotions at the right moment. There are thousands of means, but their successful application depends on how exact the study of the people has been. The fundamental principle is always the same: the man (or the actor) must be placed in such a position that his reactions to the external stimulus (the question, order or unexpected sound signal) which I have calculated and determined, shall be more or less the expected one. To be able to create the right psychological atmosphere, it is essential for me to get into the closest contact with the people I'm working with. I try to meet them outside work on common ground and observe their natural ways, knowing that these observations will give me material for further work.'<sup>1</sup>

At the findings of the January Conference, however, Pudovkin was criticised for the lifelessness of his characters. His absorption with montage had led him away from the simple characterisation and simple psychology of *Mother*. *A Simple Case* created artificial people and lost touch with the philosophy of its period. *Deserter* had moments of human emotion, such as the weeping woman at the election of delegates, but Pudovkin had retraced his steps into an out-of-date theme and you could have small interest in his hero.

Eisenstein, on the other hand, had become lost in academic exploration. He did not, it was said, understand this new period

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit.

of synthesis. He separated thought from emotion. But from the text of his G.I.K. lectures, I should have said he understood the problem only too well but was experiencing the greatest difficulty in doing anything about it except theorise.

It is at this point that we find the unanimous acceptance of *Chapaev*, a film that disappointed the foreign intelligentsia because they expected technical fireworks and receiving none, dismissed it as being dull. But this 'optimistic tragedy', as Dinamov called it, is very important. Though the theme was based on historical facts of the Civil War period, taken from a novel by Furmanov, Chapaev's own commissar, the characters and events were seen through modern eyes, from a Marxist point of view.

'*Chapaev*', says Eisenstein, 'is the answer to the very deep solving of Party problems in art.' '*Chapaev*', says Trauberg, 'is a hero but he is not above the heads of the audience. He is their brother. But in *October* the people were very high up.' '*Chapaev*', says Dovjenco, 'is tied up with the future of the cinema.' 'There is a distinct bridge between *Chapaev* and *Mother*', declares Yutkevich. 'In *Chapaev*', says Pudovkin, 'we see how a real class character is made.'

The fact is that *Chapaev* met the demands of its period. It gave the mass a hero whom they could understand. It gave them a man whose mind developed from comparative illiteracy to social and political consciousness during the course of a film. Had Pudovkin or Eisenstein taken this subject ten years ago, instead of *Mother* or *Potemkin*, they would both in their different ways have treated it as a heroic mass drama of the Civil War. As it was, the Vassilevs made an analysis of character and enlisted a professional actor to interpret the part. They forgot the earlier teachings of 'typage'—of grotesque caricature for the capitalist villain—and introduced tenderness, love and humour as integral parts of the film. They answered Dinamov's plea that 'we need actors with great passions' and 'the voice of the hero must be the voice of the epoch, and the voice of the epoch must be the voice of the hero'. *Chapaev*, with its quiet, almost theatrical style, its simple technique devoid of montage or sound devices, brought back the human being, or, more correctly, introduced the human being to Soviet cinema. It made use of characterisation as some American and British films make use of characterisation. But there was this difference. The characters lived.

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So, also, did the characters in *Kameradschaft*, a film not often mentioned when this discussion of acting arises. Despite Pabst's use of professional actors and studio-constructed sets, *Kameradschaft* falls into the widest reading of documentary. It carried an important socio-political theme. It was typical in its choice of individuals and incidents. It was unmistakably propagandist in aim, if not produced on a propagandist basis. The tragic effect of the mine disaster, in itself typical enough actual material for documentary, was intensified by linking it to the personal relationships of the characters—the old man and his nephew, the boy and his fiancée, the three German miners—but at the same time those relationships never became dominant. The internationalism of the theme came foremost throughout. I am greatly of the opinion that *Kameradschaft*, quite distinct from Pabst's other and less satisfactory work, pointed the way which the documentary of tomorrow may take. That is to imply a closer link to the story-film as we know it today but still remaining distinct in its approach to material and its emphasis on method. Perhaps the distinction may best be defined by a comparison between such an American story-film, with an industrial background, as *Black Fury*, a vehicle for Paul Muni, and Pabst's *Kameradschaft*. The difference is obvious.

All this is, I think, important in its relation to documentary today. To a great extent, from Flaherty to Grierson, documentary has pursued the line of 'typage' and not very skilfully at that. It has allowed its emotions to arise from the excitement of the event, or the drama of its theme, rather than from the emotions of the human beings within the picture. We have made this point earlier and I make it again without apology, because the actor, the natural type and the element of acting are going to be important problems in the immediate future of documentary.

If significant propagandist motives are to be served, it is clearly not the slightest use making films which will appeal only to a limited section of the public. But this has been one of the principal faults of the documentarists. If documentary is going to be significant, we must make films which will move the people and not just amuse our fellow-directors. If cinema is a branch of art at all, then it is the most vulgar branch because it is the most popular. And if the masses are interested in seeing individuals and following their emotions on the screen, then documentary must embrace individuals.

At the same time, there is no reason why we should follow in the footsteps of the story-film. If we have individuals, let them be typical and let them be real. Documentary can have no use for the synthetic and fabulous caricatures that populate the ordinary story-film. There are hundreds of people in our everyday life that have never appeared on the screen. But before we can bring them into cinema, we must be prepared to go out and understand them. Our need is for characters who will be simply understood. They must be of the audience. We must go into the streets and homes and factories to meet them. The whole evil of the American star-system, which in its way is a kind of 'typage', is that it treats with types of a false economic and social superiority. The star, for political and social reasons already explained, is nearly always an inaccessible creature living on a scale unobtainable by members of the audience. Only occasionally is he or she allowed to descend to the level of the audience, and when this happens they are nearly always popular, as in the case of Janet Gaynor. But for the most part the 'typage' of the star-system is an unusual 'typage'—a gallery of smart-alecs, whores, crooks and idealised young men. It is in the power of documentary to put real men and women on the screen. The problem lies in how it can be done.

Despite the abrupt reactions of the Soviets to 'typage', I feel that it is still probably the most satisfactory approach to human beings in documentary. But so far we have made practically no experiment. None of us in British documentary can say that we know how to work with actors; nor can we pretend that we have learnt how to create the actor out of natural material. That was well seen in Elton's *Housing Problems*. Good types, it is true, do not require to act. 'My actors', says Pudovkin, 'are everywhere—in the streets and on the farms. They are not artists, they are physically and psychologically right.' 'Typage', in fact, represents the least artificial organisation of reality, whereas the professional actor, as we have seen in our earlier analysis, represents the greatest.

But there arises this trouble. If we are going to use natural people and characterise them as individuals in our films, how are we going to persuade them to assume this or that expression, or feel this or that emotion according to our requirements? Richard Griffith, in an eloquent plea for the consideration of acting as part of the cinema plan, makes the point that no matter how



MAN OF ARAN (British 1933-34)

Gaumont-British: *directed by* ROBERT J. FLAHERTY



COUNTERPLAN (Soviet 1932)  
Lenfilm: *directed by* ERMLER and YUTKEVICH

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skilful the montage, the trained actor is still more flexible than the natural type. He can produce expressions of emotion required by the director for editing more faithfully than unrehearsed raw material.<sup>1</sup> This, I agree, is probably true of the story-film today, but I doubt if it applies to documentary.

Natural actors who are selected for documentary are typical of their class, mentality and occupation. You do not expect of them more than their natural behaviour. It would be as absurd to expect, say, a shipyard riveter to play the role of a bank clerk as it would be to expect a bus-driver to operate a movie camera, because that would be asking the riveter to possess a specially trained faculty outside his daily job. If you cannot find a bank clerk physically and psychologically suited to the character you wish to represent, then obviously you must employ a trained actor. But, at the same time, it would suggest that there is something seriously wrong with your conception.

Assuming that the documentary director has a mastery of his technique, assuming that he has an intimate understanding of the characters he wishes to express on the screen, he would be unwise to dispense with the valuable spontaneity that comes from natural acting, a spontaneity which can never be obtained from rehearsed professional material. You will recall, in this connection, Flaherty's remark that children and animals are the finest of all film material because they are spontaneous in their actions; and his pre-occupation with peasants, hunters and craftsmen because purpose has made their simple movements beautiful and expressive.

It would appear, I think, that it lies with the director to discover the natural acting ability of his characters according to their job and background, and to place himself in their position so that he can understand their feelings and their movements. He must be continually aware that, for all its powers of penetration, the camera records only the surface of what it photographs and that it is the inner meaning, the meaning below the surface, which really matters.

Your documentarist must always think from his actor's point of view. Like a sculptor or a draughtsman, he must think from the inside outwards. He must feel with his actor, understand the motives behind his actions and expressions and, by skill of camera movement and position, by skill of putting shot against

<sup>1</sup> "The Function of the Actor", *Cinema Quarterly*, vol. iii, no. 3.

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shot, angle against angle, interpret the mind of his natural actor from a psychological attitude. Flaherty is most skilful at this interpretation. Notice in *Industrial Britain* his grasp of the potter's job, his remarkable anticipation of the craftsman's hands as they mould the clay, his movement of camera always *just in front of* the movement of his actor. Perhaps the most perfect examples of his observation are the building of the igloo in *Nanook* and the patching of the curragh in *Man of Aran*. Such anticipatory movement of the camera is born, I suggest, only of long experience and of careful analysis and, most important of all, of a complete understanding of human material.

If this understanding and interpretation of the human being in documentary is difficult in Russia, it is ten times more difficult in Britain, where all the vices of class-consciousness and the self-conceit of the bourgeois mind conspire to thwart a natural approach. There is a barrier between the documentarist and his acting material which is hard to break down. Except in rare cases, your documentarist is fighting his human material, no matter how desirous of co-operation the latter may be. This is probably the reason why most of our documentarists have avoided the human being, have been content to escape into surface estimate of individuals, and have concentrated their efforts on depicting inanimate organisations and impersonal aspects of human fulfilments. They have been afraid to tell their natural actors to act. This, I believe, is being overcome. But not without loss of certain cinematic quality, as in *Housing Problems*.

In the British school it is curious to note how the women directors have been more successful than the men in handling people. Evelyn Spice, in *Weather Forecast* and her farm films, and Marion Grierson, have both, I suggest, handled their characters with greater sympathy than is found in other documentaries of the Grierson group. The reason may lie in their lack of self-consciousness and their apparent disinterest in style. Spice shoots her material almost carelessly, with little or no attention to fancy tricks of camera set-up. But what she loses in style she more than gains in human values. More probably, the success of these two directors is explained by the fact that they came to documentary from journalism. Interviewing and reporting were familiar jobs and they carried this valuable experience into cinema.

There is, of course, one main danger to the pursuit of 'typage'

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methods, that same danger which has caused reaction in the Russian school. Taken to extreme lengths, 'typage' tends to become unnatural or, if you prefer it, to become too naturalistic. Unless the type actor is in himself interesting, not only as an individual but as typical of a class section, 'typage' becomes dull and unemotional. This is true, I find, more of the literary *reportage* school, with its increasing tendency towards personal interviews, than of the impressionists. Plain statements about a man and his job are likely to prove uninteresting unless such statements are related to sociological fulfilments.

But whichever way we approach the position of the actor, natural or professional, in documentary we are met with the same problem—that the actor's relation to the film is conditioned by the real individual's relation to the world in which he lives. Only an analysis of social and economic relationships bound up with the subject of the film will give the clue to the manner of characterisation, which makes it imperative for your documentary director and producer to possess well-developed powers of social analysis.<sup>1</sup>

(b) *Background.* Documentary is supposed to find a great deal of beauty in its preference for the natural setting, whether industrial, rural, urban, or at the less civilised ends of the earth. But the beauty is the beauty of reality and not the beauty of aesthetic appeal. Documentary may prefer the unarranged scene and the unrehearsed action but this does not, I think, rule out the licence of arrangement if a greater emotional effect can thereby be gained. There can be no fixed ruling on this matter and it is foolish to attempt to make hard and fast definitions. Naturalism in itself is not reality, nor is documentary characterised wholly by its preference for natural material. The actual scene and the actual individual have virtues not possessed by artificially created imitations. But this does not dictate the necessity to avoid either the studio or the professional actor, if their use can achieve a better projection of the subject. Documentary in the past has, it is true, been mainly concerned with the creative interpretation of actuality, but this is not to say that this will be the method of the immediate future.

As far as exterior work is concerned, there can be no argument

<sup>1</sup> Three recent examples of the admirable use of real people as actors, fulfilling the above stipulations, were de Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*, Buñuel's *Los Olvidados* and Meyer's *The Quiet One*.

about real or artificial setting. The actual scene is an absolute necessity to the documentarist, is in fact inherent in his whole conception of cinema. The creation lies not in the arrangement of the setting but in the interpretation of it. The changes of atmosphere, the characteristics of the place, the position of sun and shadows, these must be observed and selected according to the requirements of the scene. They cannot be arranged or rehearsed. They can only be observed. They must be taken as they are found, although certain detail, such as the movement of objects, can be altered if the screen result will be more effective. Here, again, the film *Kameradschaft* is of interest.

As is well known, all the interior scenes of the pit were reconstructed in the studio with remarkable skill by the architect Ernő Metzner. But not until after a careful observation had been made of actual locations. Not only did Metzner and Pabst study countless photographs of wreckage attending pit explosions, similar to that which was the main event of their film, but they actually had transported to the studio portions of machinery and suchlike from which to construct sets. On the other hand, all the scenes at the pithead were taken on an actual location, Pabst employing natural types for all but his principal characters and making full use of the natural characteristics and atmosphere of the place.

Take, alternatively, a documentary like Elton's *Aero-Engine*, with its foundries and stamp-shops, machine-shops and assembling-sheds. These could not possibly have been fabricated in the studio nor, had they been transported to more accessible surroundings, would they have produced better effect.

Thus, we must obviously conclude that the use of studio or the use of the actual scene is a matter of convenience rather than of theory, that is without considering the question of cost. But the studio must, I feel, only be resorted to after a full examination of the actual scene has resulted in a decision that the latter would be unwise to use. Studio reconstruction must, in all but the rarest cases, be the last and not the first consideration.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A refreshing characteristic of recent American feature films has been their excellent use of real backgrounds, e.g. *Intruder in the Dust*, *Boomerang!*, *Panic in the Streets*, *The Men*, *The Asphalt Jungle*, *The Dividing Line*, *The Cry of the City*, etc. There is no doubt that post-war Italian films and British documentary in general exercised considerable influence in post-war Hollywood.

(iv) *Photography*

As far as the general obtaining of actual material for documentary purpose is concerned, there is one major point to be emphasised at the outset. That is the danger of false effect which often results from the loveliness inherent in cine-photography. The perfection of modern photographic materials, the sensitivity and latitude of film stock, the colour correction obtainable through the use of filters, the precision of up-to-date cameras and the efficient processing by some laboratories are such that they sometimes achieve a falsified rendering of actual material.

Photographic excellence in documentary must never be permitted to become a virtue in itself. Photography, like sound and editing, is only a contributory element to the technique required for an adequate expression of the subject. Too often, chiefly through lack of understanding between director and photographer, the photographic effect becomes dominant over subject. So long have photographers been trained by studio-routine to produce the best-looking results that they distort altogether those characteristics and atmospheric qualities which are so essential to documentary. Good photography in documentary cannot be judged by the same standards as those applicable to the studio-made picture. Their respective aims are quite different. In documentary, a slum must be a slum, with all its hideous filth and wilful ugliness. In the story-picture, a slum is as often as not a cobweb alley, dirty and dilapidated, perhaps, but photographed in a charming, sentimental manner so as to fulfil the romantic aim of the amusement cinema. Compare, for example, *Seventh Heaven* with *Housing Problems*.

Beauty is one of the greatest dangers to documentary. Beauty of individual shots is not only insufficient but frequently harmful to the significant expression of content. Beauty of purely natural things, of sunlight and flowers, of the ceiling of the sky, is unimportant unless related to purpose and theme. Beauty of symphonic and rhythmic movement is, as we have seen, nothing in itself. What is important is beauty of idea, fact and achievement, none of which have anything to do with the actual filming of individual shots.

On many occasions I have seen sequences in a documentary which have been poorly photographed but which have been the most successful part of the film. Often I have seen gloriously

photographed material which has been depressingly dull in the final film. On the other hand, I do not for a moment suggest that the pretentious attitude which exists in some quarters, that bad photography by its very badness becomes a virtue, is to be upheld. I mean, rather, that photography must be undertaken in all weathers at all times *according to the nature of the subject* and that the test of the photography lies in its creation of atmosphere and interpretation of action for the most effective interpretation of the theme.

Documentary shooting is most generally shooting on sight, shooting without time for careful lighting or perfect weather conditions, shooting in all manner of circumstances which the studio cameraman would consider impossible. Fog, rain, mist, dust and half-light are all normal conditions for documentary photography; are, in fact, often the exact conditions under which the director requires his material to be obtained. Such conditions are what the ex-studio photographer would call suitable for 'effect stuff', but when atmosphere plays such an important part as it does in documentary, these conditions are no longer those of 'effect' but perfectly normal. That is the attitude which the cameraman must possess and, if he has previously been nursed in studio conditions, it will be very difficult for him to understand documentary requirements.

Much the same may be said of ordinary straightforward exterior shooting. Whereas your studio-trained photographer will usually insist on sun, your documentary cameraman must, like the news-reel man, be prepared to shoot in any light. If his conscience hurts him, his consolation lies in the satisfaction of knowing that the director is responsible for the effect achieved and must know what effect he desires. Conditions of shooting are an inherent part of the subject being filmed, and the documentary director will shoot with, or without, sun only to achieve the result he requires. This does not imply, however, that a harvest sequence shot in poor light can, by virtue of its drabness, be lovely in effect unless drabness was the object in view. This, again, is yet another point in favour of freedom of footage and latitude of time in documentary production.

The same observations are true of interior work, where artificial lighting is almost always a necessity. Here the danger lies in over-lighting for effect, which may be what is known as 'artistic' but is untrue to the actual location. This is a danger

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which arises particularly in all forms of industrial work. Under the play of artificial light, whether incandescent or arc, machinery assumes a surface beauty quite apart from its functional value and a drop-stamp shop may look like a cathedral. To photograph machinery so that its movements and shapes are visually exciting on the screen is not the same thing as photographing machinery in relation to its conditions of work and its human fulfilments. The manufacture of a machine-gun can be made cinematically beautiful by photography and cutting but no documentary purpose is thereby achieved. Not until the instrument's function is related to the men who make it, not until its use is related to its reasons for manufacture, does the important issue arise. The danger attending good photography (in the studio sense) is at once plain.

Artificial lighting, moreover, in an industrial scene tends to create unreal atmosphere unless skilfully manipulated. It must be remembered that there is seldom time to arrange or rehearse material as in the studio, and that much of the action must be shot on speculation. The man behind the camera catches this, that or the other fragment of movement, facial expression or play of light as quickly as his skill of movement and camera experience will permit. This applies especially to work in such locations as foundries, rolling-mills, coal mines, shipyards, and all general industrial interiors where the action continues at its normal pace of routine, oblivious of the presence of a film unit.

It is, I maintain, always the job of a director to fit his filming to suit the manufacture in hand and not, as is so often the case, to 'stage' a process to meet film requirements. This calls for quick thinking and rapid working, factors which can result only from previous observation on the part of the director and smooth co-operation between the whole unit of cameraman, electricians, and director.

The placing and movement of the camera before its material is, of course, one of the major tasks of the director and should never be dictated by anything other than subject meaning. The rhetoric of a camera placed low, the god-like vision of a camera set high, these are weapons with which the director fights to put across his theme. Camera angle and camera movement, just as sound and cutting, must always be conditioned by subject and meaning and can never, on any account, play an important part in themselves, a point not often appreciated by learning directors.

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Intelligent camera placing and sensitive camera movement can and do give a full expression to material which would otherwise be dead but, in the final reckoning, technique must always come second to content.

Beyond this, there is little to be said about actual filming. The whole procedure is purely a matter of experiment and experience, tempered with instinct and, occasionally, a certain abandoned disregard of all accepted methods. It is the latter element that lifts the work of a director from being merely competent to being something exciting and exceptional. The placing of the object within the frame, the speed of a panning movement, the interpolation of slow-motion to draw special emphasis, the distribution of 'weight' in foreground and background, the intimacy of the great close-up and the importance of getting right into your material and letting it surround you, these are all matters which cannot be discussed here but must arise in their rightful place—the private theatre when the material is on the screen. At best, I can refer back to the passages dealing with the fundamental differences that exist between using the camera creatively or reproductively (see pages 76-79), and from this suggest that the analysis of subject-matter into separate shots, and the ultimate synthesis of these shots in the cutting-room in relation to sound, constitute the first exercise to be learned by the documentarist.

It would be unfair to leave the subject of photography and its part in documentary technique without reference, probably for the first time, to the debt that the documentarist, especially in Britain, owes to the cameramen who have worked in this branch of cinema. Frequently it is stated that the documentarist should always undertake his own camerawork, as do Flaherty and Wright. But, while fully agreeing that your director should be able to handle a camera if required, the employment of a separate cameraman is, I think, a necessary factor in most documentary production. Camera set-up and movement are, of course, matters upon which the director must always have final say, because both play such a vital part in the expression of content on the screen. But the experience of a cameraman on problems of difficult exposure, as well as the fact that often two or more cameras are required on one scene, generally makes advisable the presence of a cameraman as distinct from a direc-



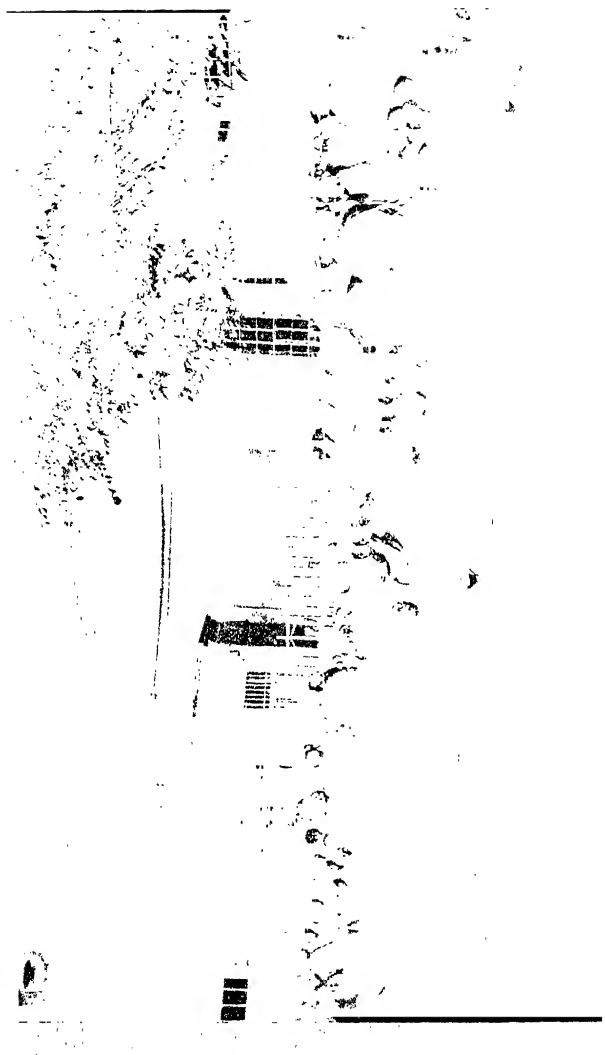
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THE FACE OF BRITAIN (British 1935)  
G.-B. Instructional: *directed by* PAUL ROTH



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THE MINE (British 1935)  
G.-B. Instructional: *directed by* J. B. HOLMES



KAMERADSCHAFT (German 1931)  
Nerofilm: *directed by G. W. PABST*

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tor. At the same time, documentary is so much the product of director and producer that the work of the photographer is often overlooked, despite the fact that, from the point of view of popular acceptance, it is the quality of the photography which greatly assists the expression of the subject.

I do not think, for example, that sufficient credit has been attributed to those photographers who, for one reason or another, have become attached to the British documentary school. Some of them have had many years' experience in the commercial studios, others have specialised in publicity films and in the field of so-called 'interest' pictures, some have learnt their job with the news-reel outfits. None of them really grasped the purpose and distinctions of documentary before they worked with progressive documentary directors, but, on the other hand, they have on their side done much to advise and guide the experimental documentarist.

They fall roughly into three groups. Those of the older generation, the ex-studio or news-reel men; a younger generation who have specialised in exterior work of all kinds; and a still younger group of assistants and others who are training themselves in this new field. Of the first, mention must be made by name of George Pocknall,<sup>1</sup> George Noble, James Rogers and Jack Rose. These four experienced and reliable photographers have, each in his own way, done a great deal to raise documentary photography to its present high position. Their adaptability to the strained conditions of documentary working (very different from the routine of the studio), their sometimes brilliant experiments with filterwork, artificial lighting and camera equipment, together with their general anxiety to achieve precisely the often difficult requirements of the documentary director (sometimes hesitant and unsure of himself), deserve, in my opinion, full admiration. To their skill of photography goes not a little of the credit for the reputation acquired by such documentaries as *The Voice of the World*, *The Face of Britain*, *Weather Forecast*, *B.B.C. The Voice of Britain*, *Aero-Engine* and *Shipyard*.

Of the second group, outstanding for their keenness and quickness to grasp the essentials of documentary work, are Frank Bundy, J. D. Davidson and Frank Goodliffe, the former especially for his excellent work in Holmes's *The Mine*. Each of these cameramen has, in his own way, contributed to the building up

<sup>1</sup> Killed by air attack, London 1941.

of the British documentary school, their individual efforts being assessed by reference to the appendix at the end of this book.

Abroad, there does not seem to be quite such an interesting array of talent. Nearly all the Soviet photographers are doing better work than the quality of their imported prints would indicate. In France, Boris Kauffmann's work with Lods demands notice and Fernhout has 'turned' some good material with Ivens; but the Continentalists, as a whole, appear to favour the combination of director-photographer as with Storck and Basse.

### (v) *Editing*

It is not my intention here to discourse at length on the principles and perplexities of the cutting-bench. Excellent technical research has already been undertaken in these matters and the results published by Arnheim and others,<sup>1</sup> and no purpose can be usefully served by again covering the ground. On the other hand, one or two general observations on cutting as associated with documentary cannot be avoided if this brief survey of production is to be complete.

In dealing with the structure of the film strip, the elements of movement and symphonic form, acting, natural material and photography, we have so far been primarily concerned with the raw materials of film. Sufficient has been said regarding the film strip for us to realise that not until it comes to the cutting-bench for arrangement and selection does the raw material begin to take shape and life. Here, by the simple procedure of placing shot against shot, by variation in length of strips, we can create rhythms and tempos, build climaxes and prepare diminuendos. Details of close-up and the telephoto lens may be brought together with panoramic views of god-like remoteness. Atmosphere may be created by the introduction of images. Drama may be built by the creation of tension. Action may be contrived around energies. Shot may be piled upon shot for emotional effect. Dissolve may give way to dissolve in the moulding of quiet contemplation. But, in the sum, no academic rule-of-thumb can be laid down for editing. No metric basis of mathematically calculated shot-lengths can exist because cutting is governed by context and action.

<sup>1</sup> *Film*, Rudolf Arnheim (Faber, 1933), *Film Technique*, Pudovkin (Newnes 1934), *A Grammar of the Film*, Spottiswoode (Faber, 1935) and *The Film Till Now* (Vision Press, 1949), all contain exhaustive enquiry into editing methods.

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Not until you reach the cutting-bench do you discover the mistakes of your shooting. You may, on the one hand, have a preponderance of close-ups and a lack of establishing long-shots or, if your weakness lies elsewhere, a surfeit of swift pan shots in a sequence where you wish to add calm to calm. Not until you come to cut do you realise the importance of correct analysis during camerawork and the essential need for preliminary observation. For unless your material has been shot from properly interrelated angles, unless the action has been understood 'from the inside', you cannot hope to 'bring it alive'. No amount of cutting, short or otherwise, will give movement to shots in which movement does not already exist. No skill of cross-reference will add poetic imagery to your sequence if you have been unaware of your images during shooting. Your film is given life on the cutting-bench but you cannot 'create life' unless the necessary raw stuff is to hand. Cutting is not confined to the cutting-room alone. *Cutting must be present all through the stages of production—scripts, photography and approach to natural material—finally to take concrete form as the sound is added.*

In modern film, it is impossible to consider picture cutting separately from sound. As will be seen in the next section, sound and picture are so closely interrelated that the cutting of one is wholly dependent on the cutting of the other. True, in much documentary today, the mute is edited before the sound track is composed, but this does not imply that the mute is unalterable. The wise cutter will edit his picture only in rough form before he creates his sound; and even during this first assembly, as during the script and shooting, the sound is kept closely in mind. Alternatively, Cavalcanti has made some experiments in composing first his sound and then cutting his picture to it. *Pett and Pott, Coal Face* and the synchronised version of *Windmill in Barbados* were made in this way. We cannot give preference to either method: it depends upon a director's conception and, not least, upon the circumstances of production. But we can say this of sound, that its addition has revolutionised the continuity of picture cutting. Sound and speech make possible methods of continuity unknown in silent films. They have quickened the whole pace of a film's progress. Sound and picture working together permit more than one idea to be expressed at the same time. Imagistic and atmospheric sound allow quite new flights of

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imagination to govern the cutting of picture, as will be seen in our later section dealing with sound technique.

Since earlier analysis has been published, there is only one aspect of editing in which marked development has taken place; that is the use of the dissolve and superimposition. The growing perfection of optical-printing has made possible the overlapping of shots for considerable footage, a device that has greatly assisted the creation of atmosphere and has furthered the idea of overlapping movement of action from one shot into the next. *The Song of Ceylon* contained many examples of this latter method. The use of combined dissolves and superimposition to form complete sequences pursues in picture the same motive of dual expression as has been experimented with in sound. Two ideas, each associated notionally, may be developed simultaneously, one foreground and the other background, thereby presenting a relationship of context to the audience in a way which could not otherwise be effected. Examples along these lines, as contained in *The Song of Ceylon* and *Shipyard*, demonstrate that this use of superimposition is quite different from the more common symbolic uses found in such films as *Enthusiasm* or *The General Line*. But however much I appreciate the possibilities of the optical-printer for most kinds of dissolve and superimposition, I equally deplore its use for the wipe-dissolve, which is nothing more nor less than an easy way out of continuity difficulties.

Taking into consideration the differences brought about by sound and the developments in superimposition, the cutting of mute film still remains based on the principles laid down with such clarity by the Russians over the last ten years. Analysis of film strip and analysis of context continue to be the fundamental factors of editing. The aim of cutting is still to stir the emotions of the audience so that it will be receptive of context without the cutting itself becoming prominent; except, that is, to the observant technician who is interested in such things.

## B. SOUND

Although it is nearly seven years since the marriage between sound and sight marked the second great development in cinema, there has really been little progress made in the uses to which this powerful blending of the dual methods of appeal has been put. The increased scope of the film made possible by the addition of sound has been described at length by theorists in almost every



DESERTER (Soviet 1933)  
Mejrabpomfilm: *directed by V. I. Pudovkin*



QUE VIVA MEXICO (Mexican 1933)  
Sol Lesser Prods: *directed* (but unfinished) by SERGEI EISENSTEIN

country. The entirely new world opened up by the potentialities of synchronised voice and fabricated sound has been indicated times without number. But looking round last year's parade of cinema (1935), the best that American and Europe can do, we find little that is in advance of product five or six years back except in an increased perfection of mechanical reproduction.

There have been, it is true, occasional flashes in the popular amusement films to signify that sound has been thought about. Now and again, in the course of some quite commonplace picture, there has occurred a situation where, consciously or unconsciously, sound has been used for something more than just reproductive effect. Its power of drama has been recognised. Much discussion was provoked, you will recall, by Hitchcock's emphasis on the word 'knife' in *Blackmail*. Mamoulian has employed the soliloquy as an expression of conscience. Several gangster melodramas made use of obvious physical sound to pile sensation upon sensation. *The Beast of the City* was a case in point. Narratage came in with a flourish and fell with a flop. Nugent's *Three Cornered Moon* made play with the disembodied voice over the unemployment scenes. Thiele, Lubitsch and Clair developed the chorus but developed it for comedy. Pabst used speech and sound to give point to his international struggle in *Kameradschaft*. The student will remember many other such instances, as in Granovsky's *Song of Life* and Vertov's *Enthusiasm*. At the same time he will admit that such experiments have been the exception and that the story-film has, on the whole, failed to make more interesting use of sound than for the mere reproduction of written dialogue and the sound of objects as performed in front of the camera and microphone.

It took documentary roughly five years to get sound at all and nearly seven years before it possessed sound in a form with which experiment was possible. Recording facilities were available, of course, before that date. Quite a few documentaries were fitted out with musical accompaniments (sometimes specially written), nearly all had spoken commentaries attached and the more *élite* were permitted the use of 'sounds off'. *Tabu* had an arrangement of music by Riesenfeld; *World Melody* by Wolfgang Zeller; *Contact* by Raybould; while the *Industrial Britain* series of the E.M.B. were decked out with popular accompaniments and informative commentaries by the firm which undertook their distribution. Elton's *Voice of the World* was, I think, the first

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documentary, at any rate in Britain, which used sound at all imaginatively. That was in 1933.

The whole problem was, and still is, that although the actual mechanical facilities for recording sound with picture were, in some cases, available, there was neither the time nor the economic means for experiment. Most documentarists had their ideas about using sound, as was apparent from the many articles published on the subject, mostly based on the theories talked about by Cavalcanti. They realised all too clearly that the power of the microphone lay in something more intelligent than merely reproducing the spoken words of people and the natural sound of objects in synchronisation. They had, we must confess, some difficulty and argument with those charming reactionary persons who, until this day, still believe that when you see an object on the screen you should also hear its sound, despite the fact that the addition of its sound serves merely to repeat the object. They appreciated and took into consideration an audience's mentality, knowing that foreknowledge permits the spectator to accept the slamming of a door or the report of a pistol, just as it does the fact that the sky is often blue and the grass green. Only when special significance is attached to such obvious sounds, they argued, need use be made of them.

As with our visual approach to actuality, maintained the documentarists, so in sound mere plain description is insufficient. We dramatise natural things and real people, arrange them to express a certain purpose, therefore we must also dramatise sound and exploit it to amplify our visual method. In the same way that we learnt how to create on the cutting-bench to use the god-like vision of the camera to express in terms of relation and conflict, to dissolve our images one into another, to create tension and suspense by the juxtaposition of shot against shot, so also must we employ the cutting-bench and the re-recording panel to give meaning and dramatic power to our sounds. Not only this, but we can get around the place with our microphone. We can pick up this, that or the other series of sounds and put them, not necessarily against their rightful visual counterparts, but maybe alongside other visual scenes, by which process we shall open up new fields for association and cross-reference. Even more interesting, we can fabricate sounds, mix one with another to produce something which has not been heard before. We can detach sounds from their origins and use them as symbols, and so on.

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To repeat, the problem lay not in the collection of the raw material or in the actual job of manufacturing and recording sound, but in being permitted to use the microphone creatively and not reproductively. In all but a few cases, the studio story-picture had remained glued to the narrow and safe groove of direct synchronisation. Documentary demanded flexibility and post-synchronisation. To achieve this, it was essential that there must be an intimate connection between the documentarist and his apparatus. Just as the documentarist had turned upside down the notions and conventions of the studio cameraman, had on occasions seized the very camera out of his hands, had built up a whole new standard of photography to meet new purposes) so must he upset the orthodox methods of studio recording, get to the mixing panel himself, and create with his sound in the same way that he learnt to create with his picture. It was no question of accompaniment, although for most uses the post-synchronisation of sound to picture proved the more convenient. It was a question of sound springing from the same dominant mind as the picture, of the two producing an inseparable unity of which one half would be useless without the other.

Just how documentary has contrived, and is still contriving to get down to this relationship with sound is not our immediate concern. Rather are we interested in the results of this placing of sound on an experimental basis. Some of the difficulties are well summed up by the G.P.O. Film Unit's struggle to get sound equipment, others are not available for discussion.<sup>1</sup> The point is that, in Britain, and apparently in the U.S.S.R., documentary has in rather less than two years made use of the sound medium to an extent unthought of in the ordinary story-film. In some half-dozen sound films, produced under severe economic conditions, documentary has begun to show what lies ahead of cinema if its resources are used intelligently and to specific purpose. Our aim here, then, is to see what lines these experiments have taken and to speculate generally on the further uses of sound to increase the influence of the documentary film.

### (i) *Raw Materials*

The various kinds of sound—music, speech, natural sound and the rest—and the collecting of same by means of either studio recording or excursions with a mobile sound-truck may all be

<sup>1</sup> 'The G.P.O. Gets Sound', John Grierson, *Cinema Quarterly*, vol. ii, no. 4.

grouped under a general heading of raw materials. They do not represent the creative use of sound, which is accomplished at a later stage on the cutting-bench and the re-recording panel, but rather the first gathering of material from which the eventual sound track will be created for cementing with the visual (mute) strip.

In the same way that the collection of the visuals is conditioned by factors arising out of production circumstances, so also is the collection of sound. Some of it may be lengths of track recorded in direct synchronisation with the picture, some may be shot wildtrack (from which endless loops of constant sound and edited tracks may be made for re-recording), some may be fabricated. Use of method depends wholly upon the aim in view, accessibility and economic conditions. For convenience of discussion, however, we may divide the raw materials into three groups—synchronised and non-synchronised sound and speech and music—remembering at the same time that these groups are elastic and that actual production conditions are the final determining factor.

(a) *Synchronised Sound and Speech.* Although for the most part it is found convenient to use post-synchronisation methods in documentary, that is to say the addition of sound and speech after the visuals have been taken and edited, there are occasions when direct synchronisation of picture with sound are essential. These may take place either on the actual location or, if absolutely necessary, in the studio. Synchronised sound and speech are, by their very nature, glued to their visual counterpart. Their job, therefore, is the simple one of explanation and guidance. There is nothing particularly imaginative in their use, unless special dialogue is required. Even then, the objective is purely literary. Sounds of the more obvious kind, such as a pile-driver, a pneumatic riveter, hammering or footsteps, require exact synchronisation with their visual origins, quite apart from their use for more imaginative purposes. Earlier we have deplored the point of view that demands to hear the sound of every object seen on the screen, but we deplore this only when it is carried, on reasons of principle, to the lengths of monotony or absurdity. There is no doubt that if the audience sees a hammer hit a metal plate on the screen, then the sound must accompany the action in synchronisation, unless there is some significant purpose to be served by suppressing the sound. But if taken to excessive lengths, such

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as attempting to synchronise sound to the sharpening of a pencil or to feet walking through grass, the method becomes ludicrous and merely irritates the audience as well as driving the sound-recordist out of his mind.

All direct synchronised sound need not be obtained at the same time as the picture. Often it is found that a particular noise can be more satisfactorily (from a recordist's point of view) produced by other means in the studio, a point with which we shall deal in our next section.

Generally speaking, therefore, synchronised sound and speech obtained simultaneously do not play a large part in documentary production. In fact, I can think of few documentaries where it has formed anything but a small incident necessary to the subject, as in *B.B.C: The Voice of Britain and Citizens of the Future*. There is a practical point that we might well remember in this connection—the greater difficulties attending the portability of sound equipment when compared with the compactness of the modern automatic picture camera. Sound-trucks are essentially large and cumbersome objects. They attract attention, disturb the natural characteristics of the material being shot and upset the intimacy which the documentarist tries to create between himself and his subject. Mobile sound, as we shall see, is most useful for the gathering of natural wildtracks, in which case it is used separately from the picture camera.

There remains a third kind of synchronised sound—the much-discussed commentary or narration. One method, the easier and therefore the most used, is to engage a well-sounding person—often with broadcasting or theatrical associations—and have him recite the written comment with one eye on the typescript and the other on the screen. The result is generally adequate to the type of film for which it is used: impersonal, without feeling and, I suppose, to be regarded as inoffensive. The other, more experimental method, is to make use of people actually engaged on the work with which the picture deals—sometimes an engineer, perhaps a ship's draughtsman, possibly a miner, docker, postman or journalist. I do not think the voice itself is of great importance. It is the sincerity and understanding and intimacy with which the words are delivered that is valuable.

There is room here for considerable experiment, for use of different dialects according to the locations of the subject, for the merging of more than one voice as the film develops, a device

that was skilfully used in *B.B.C.: The Voice of Britain*. There is room, also, for experiment in relating more intimately the voice with the screen, perhaps to be achieved with less formality and more spontaneity, so that the speaker becomes a part of the film rather than the detached 'Voice of God' which seems so dear to some producers of documentary. The personal interview, at present badly used in news-reels, might well be tried, so long as the characterisation is interesting. Let the smith in charge of the steam-hammer tell us in his own language what he is doing. Let the shot-firer in the mine speak of his own job. They can do it better than the professional commentator at three guineas a time; in simpler, more humble and more honest speech. Yet another line that might be developed is that of the poet as narrator. I am surprised that the poet has not already been enlisted to documentary. We have talked of poetry in style and poetry in visual image but there has been scarcely any attempt to introduce poetry into film speech. Grierson is, I believe, making some experiment in this direction. Auden's use of chorus in *Coal Face* was stimulating. It was unfortunate that the recording was not better. Poetry, the chorus, and the use of several speakers in rotation all provide lines of development for the narration, for getting right away from the conventional method of the professional commentator.<sup>1</sup>

Where commentary is concerned, the question of synchronisation arises only when the commentator is speaking his words directly with the picture before him. For untrained speakers, such as we have suggested, a much more satisfactory method is the speaking of the sentences 'wildtrack', quite separately from the picture, the two being brought together on the cutting-bench and by re-recording. Not only does this achieve greater accuracy of synchronisation but it permits the commentary to be changed, sentences deleted and transferred, after the words have been fixed on to film.

(b) *Non-Synchronised Sound and Speech*. The collection of non-synchronised sound and speech, that is to say the recording of required sound divorced from the picture shooting, presents one of the most fascinating and experimental aspects of the sound medium. Familiarly, the process is called 'wildtrack', meaning

<sup>1</sup> It was this theory that prompted the use of the voice-argument in the *World of Plenty* cycle. A brilliant use of multi-voiced narration was in Carol Reed and Garson Kanin's *The True Glory*, vide pp. 261, 347, 348.

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the gathering of all kinds of speech and sound on to track which can later be cut up and edited into loops and sub-tracks for re-recording with the mute. Here both the sound-track and recording studio are useful. Some of our sounds, for example, may be such that they can only be obtained on the spot—like the shunting of trains in a goods-yard, the general conversation and noise of a sorting-office or the characteristic sounds of a railway station. In such cases, the sound-track is indispensable and can bring back to the cutting-room a wealth of interesting sounds from the world at large. Other sounds are better fabricated in the recording studio, particularly sounds which, for dramatic reasons, are required to be isolated from their surroundings. The dirge of a dredger, for instance, may be manufactured by (1) rubbing a pencil on a child's slate, (2) drawing the sharp edge of a spade across a concrete floor, and (3) pushing an empty iron tank around on a floor scattered with small pebbles. All three sounds are recorded separately and mixed together into one track at a final recording. Expansion of such methods is limited only by ingenuity. A million-volt-arc, in itself a terrifying sound, may be easily fabricated by recording (1) tearing strips of calico close to the microphone, (2) striking matches, (3) using the peak points only of a track-record of a cracking stockwhip, and (4) dropping pebbles on to a metal plate. Each of these sounds is recorded singly, the tracks cut up, some put in reverse and arranged into synchronisation with each other. The whole four are re-recorded on to one final track into which small lengths of unmodulated (mute) track are inserted to form the necessary breaks in the sound. The choice between sound thus artificially created and real sound recorded on the spot is, once again, a question of convenience and practicability. The skill lies not in how they are recorded but in what manner they are used. This we shall come to presently.

Speech may be used and recorded in much the same way. Criticism has been raised against the employment of the disembodied voice, by which is meant the introduction of conversation and incidental speech without direct synchronisation with the imaginary speakers. The trick can, without doubt, be over-worked and misused, but with restraint, wildtrack recordings of casual sentences or ejaculations can be of considerable atmospheric value. The speech may take various forms according to the subject. Soliloquy or monologue or three-part talk all play

their part. Comments on sport, allotments, homelife all offer likely topics. Employment, for obvious reasons, is dangerous ground where we are dealing with industrial conditions. Frequently the disembodied voice may be used to make reference to the visual action without showing the origin of the comments. Telephone conversations between, say, works-managers and shop-foremen might be overlaid on shots of men at the job which is the topic under discussion. Radio again offers further opportunities. The chorus may be used to imaginative effect, not just the orthodox chorus of voices but the chorus of sounds used in repetition. Shouts, orders, ejaculations, exclamations, humming, whistling, each may be incorporated into the sound script, recorded wildtrack and be edited into position for a final re-recording. Experiment may be extended indefinitely.

(c) *Music*. Music always has and, I believe, always will form a valuable part of film creation. It performs certain duties in the exciting of human emotions which cannot be replaced by the use of either speech or sound. To use Walter Leigh's phrase: 'It is an artificial organisation of sound for purely emotional purposes, a representation of physical movement in terms of sound and rhythm.'<sup>1</sup> But one thing is quite obvious, that music required today for incorporation into the sound track, along with natural sound and speech, is absolutely different from either orthodox concert music, or from the kind of music which was written as an accompaniment to silent films and later for synchronised scores. The old idea that music must fulfil the function of an undercurrent to the picture, just quiet enough to prevent distraction from the screen, being faded down when the commentator speaks and faded up again when he has finished, this is as antiquated as the type of film for which it is still used.

Modern music for sound film must be an integral part of the sound script, must on occasions be allowed to dominate the picture, must on others perform merely an atmospheric function and frequently it must be intermixed with natural sound and speech. From what has already been done in this way, principally in Leigh's interesting work for *The Song of Ceylon*, I gather that economy is the most important factor. A short phrase or a few bars of music can express, it appears, the equivalent of a complete movement in a symphony. Consequently, the writing of

<sup>1</sup> 'The Musician and the Film', Walter Leigh, *Cinema Quarterly*, vol. iii, no. 2. Leigh was killed in action in the Middle East, summer, 1942.

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film music must start from a basis quite different from that associated with orthodox musical composition. Similarly, because of the microphone's peculiar capacities for reproduction, instrumentation can be arranged on much more economical lines than for ordinary musical performances. By a shrewd use of balance, that is the arranging of instruments before the microphone according to their proportionate volumes, four or five instruments can be made to perform the work of three times the number, with equal if not greater success. The old belief that a large orchestra is necessary for powerful effect is, I understand, rendered obsolete by a proper understanding of the resources of the microphone.<sup>1</sup>

### (ii) *Creative Uses*

The foregoing is, then, an indication of how the raw materials of sound, both synchronised and wildtrack, may be collected from natural and artificial sources. We have seen that, like the picture camera, the microphone has immense powers for gathering fragments of the world's sound, together with specially contrived passages of artificial music and spoken words, from which the documentalist may create his sound track. This raw material, let us emphasise again, has no importance in itself. Its methods of collection and fabrication are interesting only as details attending reproduction. The final problem is always contained in how this sound is to be used creatively, how it is to be lifted from the status of mere description to the function of bringing alive actuality to special purpose.

From the scope presented by the wealth of raw sound material, it is clear that sound can bring to documentary a contribution which will take many years to explore. It offers to the creative director not only an unlimited library of speech, music and natural sound, but the infinite possibilities opened up by the use of chorus, monologue and fabricated sound. It presents a score of different elements which can be employed to create drama, atmosphere, tension, tempo and poetic reference for any theme which may be provided. In fact, sound more than doubles the expressive capabilities of the silent film and puts the whole

<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that British documentary led the way in using the services of outstanding composers such as Bax, Rawsthorne, Vaughan Williams, Alwyn, Britten, Clifton Parker, Esdaile, all of whom subsequently worked on feature films.

method of interpretation on a higher and more influential basis than before. Because of this increased power, therefore, there is need for the strictest discipline and organisation in the composition of the sound track, and careful analysis, not only of its own structure, but of its continuous relationship to the picture with which it is wedded.

No longer is it possible, as in the early days of sound film, to regard the sound track as just an accompaniment to the picture. Listened to alone, the sound track of a film may form a disconnected series of sounds and words, music and intervals of silence. But heard in conjunction with the picture for which it is intended, the sound track presents not merely an arrangement of sounds, words and music to explain the meaning of the visuals but an integral part of the picture itself, appealing to the reason as well as to the emotions of the audience. It is obvious that the structural composition of the sound track requires just as much creative thought and work as that of the mute and, in some cases, may take longer to produce than the edited picture. This is a difficult point for the commercially-minded producer to appreciate with his fixed ideas of 'fitting sound to a picture'.

There is, above all, this important fact to remember: that sound attached to picture immediately produces a curious sensation of intimacy. Observed in silence, a film builds up a barrier of illusion between itself and the spectator. No matter how intimately observed and edited, the material on the screen is separated from the audience by an unreal sense of illusion. But with the addition of sound, whether synchronous or not, that barrier is partially removed. The audience cannot prevent itself from participating in the action shown on the screen. This peculiar quality of sound can, and often is, a source of danger. On the one hand, it tends to permit carelessness to arise in the making of the sound track and to permit the selection of one sound rather than another, not because of its particular significance, but because of its capacity for producing a sense of reality. And on the other, it induces slackness in the making of the picture, permitting a less selective choice of visuals in the belief that the sound track will cover the shortcomings. These two dangers have been especially noticeable in some recent documentaries, where visuals have been used which, formerly, would have been discarded without discussion, and also where sounds have been included merely because of their sensational effect

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and not because of their significance in the expression of the content.

Every sound in a cinema, just as every movement on the screen, is significant. We must remember that there is a great difference between film sound and ordinary everyday sound, or even sound heard in a legitimate theatre. In actuality we select for ourselves those sounds which are important and unusual and, for the most part, disregard normal sounds of which we know the origin. In the city street, for example, we are so accustomed to the noise of traffic that we pay little attention to it, unless a particular sound, such as a burst tyre or a motor-horn, warns us of something abnormal. In a restaurant, the familiar clatter of plates and the buzz of conversation proceed unheeded until, perhaps, a dish is dropped or a disturbance occurs, when immediately we look for the cause of the unexpected noise. And, secondly, except in abnormal circumstances, sound comes to our ears from all directions. Sound is occurring, or may occur, all around us.

On the stage, similar but more confined conditions are present. Out of the various sounds that issue from the stage into the auditorium, we select instinctively those which are important, such as speech, laughter, a telephone ringing or a knock at the door. But we ignore those which have no significance to the action (unless they are unexpected elements of surprise), like the sound of commonplace movements, footsteps and suchlike. In the cinema, however, the situation is quite different. Every sound issues from one source, the loudspeaker. Consequently every sound is received by the audience with equal attention until its screen origin is ascertained and its significance understood. The smallest of sounds may, in this way, assume temporary importance, may even be misunderstood in meaning if there is doubt as to its origin. Thus it is obvious that every sound, passage of speech and music incorporated in the sound track must be placed there for a definite, intentional meaning and all extraneous sound omitted, a principle that has direct bearing on the problem of 'seeing an object and hearing its sound' discussed earlier. For this reason, it is patently absurd to insist on the inclusion of every sound of which we may see the origin unless some significance is thereby served, a habit often pursued by pseudo-documentarists who seem incapable of understanding the first principles of sound.

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From these elementary observations, you will grasp that the writing of the sound script in documentary is of first importance. Like the visual script, it is elastic in detail. It sets out the treatment of sound which will be employed, gives a clear idea of what raw material is required and how it will be manipulated, at a later stage, during the actual task of creating the sound track, which comes about through the inter-working of two processes.

(a) *The Cutting-Bench.* Once sound has been fixed on to film, by a photo-electric process of which a description here is unnecessary, it can be cut and arranged, pieced together and inter-related, precisely in the same manner as mute film. You will be aware, of course, that right up till the time of making the final synchronised print, sound and picture, both positive and negative, are manipulated separately. With a pair of scissors, some cement and a movieola on which to hear your tracks, any one sound can be placed in front of, or after, another sound, no matter whether it has been obtained synchronously or wild-track. You may, if you like, reverse your track and play it backwards. You may cut out a certain peak point and discard the rest of the sound. You may separate sounds with silence by inserting unmodulated, that is noiseless, track. You may, with the aid of a synchronising-machine, place any length of sound you please alongside any length of picture, so that they synchronise or not as the desire may be. In fact, you may juggle with your sound until your energy is exhausted, after which you may begin to re-cut. Whole sections of your film may be constructed in this manner, single sounds or words against corresponding visuals. Other sections may require other sounds to be mixed on top of your existing sounds, in which case we come to the second process of editing which entails using the re-recording panel.

(b) *The Re-Recording Panel.* By simple cutting and synchronising you may put any sound alongside any picture. By re-recording, you can put any sound, or series of sounds, on top of another sound, so that one may be heard through the other. Or you may overlap one sound into another at any given point for purposes of continuity. Alternatively, you may bring some sounds up loud and diminish others to quietness, thereby providing foreground and background. You can not only superimpose sounds, speech and music by the fusion of several tracks into one final track, but you can orchestrate your sounds by giving them different volumes according to your desired effect. The re-recording panel, with its

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possibilities of merging together at the same time edited tracks, endless loops of constant sound and additional sound or speech direct from a microphone in synchronisation with the picture, offers probably the widest field for experiment of any instrument employed in film production. Its variations and potentialities for orchestrated sound are infinite. It only remains for the documentarist to use its resources to the full, provided he is given the time in which to experiment by his producer.

These, then, are the instruments and processes which may be used for creative purpose, through which sound may be made an integral part of picture, so that the whole film may be powerfully expressive of the subject at hand. From the experiments that have so far been made, there seem to be two directions in which sound technique has been developed—imagistic and atmospheric sound.

With the remarkable flexibility of sound tracks, by cutting and re-recording, it will have been clear that the disassociation of picture from sound might be expected to lead to interesting results. Such a method does, it is true, put an unaccustomed strain on the attention of the spectator, who is accustomed to hearing sound in direct connection with picture. Thus we must stress that the greatest care should be observed to avoid confusion in this co-ordinating of sight and sound through ideas rather than through logical perception. It is, in a sense, using sounds as symbols to obtain emotional effect. We are familiar with the sound of a siren which inevitably accompanies every shot of a liner in the amusement cinema. We are, in fact so familiar that the sound alone will suggest the liner without the latter being shown. The method may be pursued. A dog barking in the distance overlaid on shots of a village can suggest a lazy, hot summer's afternoon. A train whistle over an industrial landscape can suggest industrial activity. An aeroplane sound can suggest height without the machine being seen. In a Pudovkin film, there was mention of a street fight between workers and police. The sound of fists was replaced by the sounds of industry: symbols of the power for which the workers stood. The method is not a freak of clever technique. It is a very important feature in the imaginative use of sound and can add great strength to the dramatisation of actuality. But this is not all.

It has been found that as soon as sounds are separated from

their sources, they become images or symbols of those sources; a fact which permits more than one idea to be projected at the same time by a single shot. We may go further. When separated from its source, a sound will not only become a symbol of that source but a symbol of what that source represents. The ship's syren becomes not only the symbol of a ship, but it may also become the symbol of warning. A bell may be a symbol of a coastguard station but it may also be a symbol of hope, or tragedy, as occasion arises. There is, for example, the ending of Ekk's *Road to Life*. The train draws up in the village bearing on its engine the dead body of the boy. A great crowd awaits it. But there is silence except for the hiss of the escaping steam, which expresses the grief of the crowd with its long-drawn-out sighing. The steam is used as a symbol of grief. The closing shots of *Six-Thirty Collection* showed the cleaners sweeping up the litter in the sorting-office after the work is done: over them is heard the puffing of a departing train.

Extensions of this imagistic use of sound are found in Wright's *Song of Ceylon*. The rhythmic noise of a mountain train is continued over an elephant pushing down a tree, an association of power and at the same time a comment. The market prices of tea, spoke by radio-announcers and dictated in letter form by business executives, are overlaid on scenes of natives picking in the tea gardens, the 'Yours truly' and 'Your obedient servant' of the dictation being ironically synchronised over the natives at their respective tasks. In *The Face of Britain* the plea for slum clearance is ironically commented upon by shots of slums overlaid with the sounds of explosions; but the slums remain unchanged.

Atmospheric sound often develops on a principle of cross-sectioning. The same, perhaps conversation, perhaps dance music, perhaps a prayer or an S.O.S. message, is carried out over a cross-section of the community in town and countryside. The music of a barrel-organ, previously associated with busy town life, is overlaid on shots of a shipyard where the hull of a growing ship lies idle. A religious anthem is prolonged beyond the service in a cathedral and laid over a cross-section of blast furnaces and coal mines, shipping and agriculture. I cite from examples of recent films but the method has scarcely as yet been explored. You will see that, in sympathy with documentary's major aim, it is capable of the widest of human references. The future of

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sound, linked up with dramatic, symphonic and poetic elements, will be inherent in the future of documentary. Sound will be inseparable from sight: the two together indicate the power with which documentary is now invested.

### C. TREATMENT

Before almost anything else, we must stress the importance of the director's awareness of the continual change and growth in his material. Before he can create, before he can become in any way significant in his work, he must be able to understand the social relationships contained in his theme and be dynamic in his social analysis. Not only must he feel his subject and its implications in his head but in his heart. He must feel and interpret as his natural material feels, or else he will never create on the screen. His actors are natural people and he must understand their mentality, their background and their outlook before he can train his camera on their actions. This understanding is, I think, an attribute possessed more by Flaherty than by any other documentalist, noticeable especially in his *Nanook* and the handling of the craftsmen—potters and glassblowers—in *Industrial Britain*. It was the secret of Macharet's observation of his actor-workmen in *Men and Jobs* and of Grierson's interpretation of the seamen in *Drifters* and *Granton Trawler*. Each of these directors felt with his actors, understood their movements and behaviour, analysed their thoughts and emotions, knew what lay in their minds, before daring to bring their cameras to focus and turning celluloid.

I put this point strongly because, as a new generation of would-be documentarists grows up, I see an increasing tendency towards an avoidance of these vital requirements. Young men, enthusiastic and excited, are sent out with units on jobs before any attempt has first been made to analyse their material. Back they come, often with lovely photographic effects (for which the credit should go to the cameraman), are praised for the good-looks or sensational effects of their work, but in almost every case they have missed the essential importance of their subject. Here, yet again, does the absence of proper production supervision give cause for alarm.

#### (i) *Approach and Style*

From what we have seen of documentary work, there would

appear to be several types of approach to material and subject bound up in the various traditions, each dictated by the purpose for which the film is being made, as well as by the personal inclinations of the producer or director in question. But at this present immature stage of the documentary method, I intend dealing with only two kinds of style: those which seem to be most prevalent in current production and of which examples are ready to hand.

Firstly, there is the descriptive, or journalist, approach. Secondly, the impressionist method. Neither may, at this point in documentary's case-book, be claimed as superior to the other. Their choice is a matter of production purpose combined with the personal preference of the directors concerned.

The aim of the descriptive documentary would seem to be an honest effort to report, describe or delineate a series of events, or the nature of a process, or the workings of an organisation on the screen. It has been defined as a method of *reportage*. It is well exemplified in Elton's *Housing Problems*. The less your journalist director sensationalises his material, the better is his purpose served, because by dramatisation he would sacrifice exactness for impressionism. Actually there is no such thing as a descriptive film, because the camera, microphone and reproducing apparatus do not give a completely faithful representation of what they record. The illusion of accuracy is, however, sufficiently good as to be found generally acceptable.

The authentic descriptive film, therefore, prohibits that dramatisation of natural material which is the essence of the impressionist approach. It does, I gather, permit a certain mild sensationalising of event and a creation of suspense related to incident, but only so long as the accuracy of the reporting is not impaired. Its major purpose of information demands a great deal of analysis of subject before film interpretation is attempted; an understanding of mechanics if machinery is being treated; a grasp of detailed organisation if a public service is being put on the screen. It deals with a process rather than with the results of that process. It may occasionally fly off at a tangent into pure sensationalism, as in the end part of Elton's *Aero-Engine*, but this is merely a concession to the private desires of the director. It is concerned with the working of this or that, rather than with the effects of such working. And although, I suspect, every technical resource should be employed, it aims to instruct rather than to

**NIGHT MAIL (British 1936)**

**G.P.O. Film Unit: *directed by* BASIL WRIGHT and HARRY WATT**



NORTH SEA (British 1938)  
G.P.O. Film Unit: *directed by* HARRY WATT

enlighten its audience by pursuit of a literary as opposed to an emotional appeal.

In the long run, this *reportage* approach is, I am inclined to think, more difficult than the impressionist style, although the latter requires a wider sensibility to human emotions and a more general knowledge of human affairs than the pure descriptive approach. But impressionism does not, as is frequently asserted, necessarily imply a superficial approach. On the contrary, it demands just such an exacting understanding of material as the *reportage* method, but it selects only those elements of the subject which are capable of dramatisation. It aims to produce a general emotional effect and not a detailed literary description. It aims to disturb the audience emotionally, to make it feel for itself the social or other references contained in the subject. But it is a mistake to assume that by so doing the impressionist method is any the less instructive as far as the wider issues of education may be served. Its dramatic interpretation, its free use of climax, and tension, create a consciousness which, I suggest, leads to a demand for more detailed knowledge. Your descriptive style, on the other hand, supplies both knowledge and information without first creating the demand.

There is little doubt, moreover, that in consideration of the present state of education among theatre audiences, a state which has come about through years of entertainment nourishment and conventional methods of upbringing, the impressionist style of documentary is the more successful as far as the projection of sociological themes is concerned. The time will probably come when the descriptive style will find its required level of interest among theatre audiences, but that time, in my experience, is not yet. The documentary intended primarily for theatre distribution must, I am sure, be dramatic in style and form even at the risk of losing accuracy of report. It is the broad impression which is most necessary and it is only the impressionist method that will sufficiently emotionalise factual material to secure significant audience response.

I am aware that the impressionist style is regarded with mistrust and, for that matter, we have already exposed the dangers of the Continental Realists begun by *Berlin*. At the same time, I believe that the weakness of the pseudo-realists lies more in their lack of social analysis and their delight in aestheticism for its own sake than in their impressionist style. On the other hand, im-

pressionism has one major weakness—resort to symbolism. It is in the nature of the method to search for symbols which will express an idea, rather than an interpretation of facts by more analytical research. The use of a smoking factory chimney to symbolise Industry, or of a parade of revolving wheels to express Power, is a dangerous escape from facts into superficial impressions for sensational effect. You will remember the subterfuge of the bull's wedding in *The General Line*; and I have a weight on my mind about the shirking of issues in the last part of *The Face of Britain*. To slide into the use of symbols instead of getting down to a straightforward representation of the facts is the outstanding failing of the impressionist style and must, I think, be very seriously suppressed if the impressionist method is to be significant.

From our distinctions between the two styles, it may seem that the impressionist and reporting methods deny each other, but this, in my opinion, is only a temporary phase arising out of the first difficulties of the documentarist tackling really important problems and subject-matter. A synthesis of both styles is not improbable; is, in fact, quite definitely indicated in some directions. We have seen, for example, how such a combination coincided with that other major problem of documentary—the interpretation of the human being.

## (ii) *Structure and Scenario*

From our survey of materials and methods, it will be clear that the composition and writing of the documentary script is quite different from that of the scenario of the orthodox story-film. Some indication of this has been made when we dealt with sound. Whereas the scenario of the story-film may, and should, contain a detailed shot-description of the final film, even to the extent of elaborate camera instructions and set designs, the documentary script is concerned primarily with expressing the attitude towards the theme, the references involved and the construction and interrelation of the sequences. In the majority of documentary subjects, the material is obviously quite raw and unrehearsed. A great deal of the actual shooting is purely impulsive, governed by the spontaneous action and unanticipated nature of the events. It is possible, of course, to obtain in advance a fairly accurate grasp of what will occur when the camera is turning, but natural behaviour is not always repetitive and your docu-

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mentarist must, for the most part, shoot at sight. For this reason, it is imperative that the documentarist should be given opportunity for the preparation of his shooting and adequate time for the study of his subject before going into production, both factors which eventually reduce the costs of the picture.

The original script in documentary provides a very fair indication of the material wanted, but it does not, and for obvious reasons cannot, give anything approaching a laborious description of the finished picture. It is concerned especially with the form of the projected film and, if dramatic in purpose, with the crises that arise naturally from the subject and their place in the development of continuity. It is on this ground that, I believe, the journalist or descriptive documentary sometimes fails, because there is a prevalent tendency to discard orthodox methods of construction and to allow the film to describe as it pursues its course of reporting.

This deliberate suppression of crisis in the *reportage* method, this studied avoidance of sensationalised event, tends to deprive the documentary of its form, another point we may make in favour of the impressionist style, which unashamedly admits the use of conventional peak points and a gradually developing curve of continuity through the film. Wright's *Song of Ceylon*, I feel, would have gained emotionally by a greater dramatisation of his material, which might have resulted from a simpler conception than the four-part dialectic method adopted. This, also, is my criticism of many of the Grierson group's documentaries—that they are often formless and inclined to wander rather than march from start to finish. The series of films made by Elton and Anstey for the British Commercial Gas Association particularly displays this shortcoming. *Potemkin* is, in my opinion, still the model of classic form and sequence construction; with *Turksib* not so far behind.

Not all form, however, need take the beat of a marching tempo. In view of the instructional and far-reaching persuasions of documentary, consideration might be given to a tempo of revelation. By a nobility of treatment, it is possible to present the theme and facts of some subjects by a process of revealing, not unlike the unfolding of the petals of a flower in slow motion, until the full content and form are displayed for the audience to draw its conclusions. Imagery and poetry will here find their fullest use. The documentary method may, on the one hand, take the

violent fighting line of a *Turksib*, or it may, on the other, observe the point that first implications are not always the most important and pursue a course of revelation, as in *The Song of Ceylon*. Which style is chosen for which subject depends wholly on the purpose to be served and the director's particular ability. The relation of tempo to form, that is the control of movement both of material and of editing in relation to subject, has still to be made the aim of experiment.

Form and construction immediately raise the question of length, to which we have already made reference. Generally speaking, I am in a minority when I plead for brevity in documentary, but my feeling on this much-discussed problem is probably influenced more by experience of documentary reception in the theatres than by personal inclination. The comparison between radio talks, journalism and documentary has been made before, but it must be underlined. In their more serious aspects, each is concerned with the representation of facts and arguments to the people. And whatever the size of their subject, they are the better for simple statement and economy of style. As things are at present and however deplorable you may think it, you cannot get away from the fact that the ordinary public goes into the theatres to see stars and stories—unless it happens to be a wet afternoon. Until very drastic changes of a social kind are made, this position will continue and must, therefore, be taken into consideration when we discuss the methods and effects of propaganda and instruction.

If it is to have a place in the public theatres today, documentary must come second to artificiality and seduction. But it is, I think, none the less influential for that. We must make allowance for a tolerant and mildly uninterested audience, upon whom our films must create emotional effect as well as persuade to a certain way of thinking. To do this most successfully is to do it swiftly. To shift not only apathy, but to stimulate interest and even feeling, demands conciseness and crispness in film and sureness and sincerity in its director. So many documentaries look well in the private-theatre. So many evoke the respect of fellow-technicians. But so few stand up against the lethargy of the public audience in the mass. And if propaganda is being served that, all in all, is the final test.

The documentary scenario, then, is something like the treatment stage of the story-film script, except that it sets out very

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distinctly the social references contained in the subject. Typical material, both human and inanimate, is collected and studied, where practicable, at first hand. It is discussed in conference with the producer and other directors, and from it are improvised the events and characterisation of the film. In it is described what form the dialectic will take. In it are indicated the particular elements of irony and symbolism, poetic reference and symphonic movement, which it is believed will most effectively express the theme according to the purpose in view.

At the same time we must remember that the whole conception and its theoretical working out is elastic, for should you work strictly according to the written script, you will not introduce anything which might arise during actual shooting. It was not until Eisenstein saw the Odessa Steps that he conceived the famous sequence. Although the script should, wherever possible, contain the broad lines of treatment and the sociological or other references arising from the theme, nevertheless the documentarist must be free to work according to his feelings all along. He must be at liberty to incorporate certain incidents and motives which may suddenly arise from his subject during the making of the film after the first script-work has been done.

The matter of construction and continuity is again governed by purpose and subject, but, if the theory is held by your director, dialectic as a method of philosophical statement can play an important part in structure and treatment. Reference has already been made to the dialectic method of film treatment in connection with Eisenstein's approach to the historical material of *October*. And it was upon similar lines that he apparently conceived the abortive *Que Viva Mexico*. Most of the work of other Russian directors has been dependent on the same dialectic basis, but most of them, as we have said earlier, have failed to achieve a representation of the synthesis that arises from the meeting of opposing forces. The issue is closely related to the problem of expressing the human being, to which we have also paid attention earlier. Eisenstein's *October* was the dialectic of the mass; Pudovkin's *St Petersburg* was the dialectic of the individual expressing the mass; Dovjenko's *Earth* was the dialectic of natural forces.

Despite the absence in the past of a completely successful working out of a theme by the dialectic method in terms of film, there seems every reason to believe that a most interesting

method of documentary may eventuate from this line of development. All the principles which we have discovered in the documentary approach to actuality combine in support of this suggestion. Most frequently we have found that it is the social and economic relations contained in the theme which are the real controlling forces of documentary. Ideas arising from the theme have seldom been so important as the facts. Only in the romantic traditions of the Naturalistic school and the superficial rhythms of the Continental Realists has idealism been allowed to displace materialism. 'The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual process of life', wrote Marx.<sup>1</sup> The mind of the documentarist is trained best, I believe, by moving in a dialectic pattern, although it must be pointed out that this has nothing whatsoever to do with the nature of the facts contained within his subject. The dialectical reasoning is concerned with the attitude of mind of the director and not with the subject-material with which he is working.

As is widely known, the dialectic is a method of philosophical reasoning. As explained in a recent analysis,<sup>2</sup> it supposes a pattern of (1) a proposition, (2) a contradiction arising from that proposition, and (3) a reconciliation of the two, thus providing a pattern-of-three prescription, familiarly epitomised by (1) thesis, (2) antithesis, and (3) synthesis. Upon this formula the whole dialectic theory is based and, despite the fact that by some modern authorities it is considered an out-of-date method when applied to history, we can see with little effort its possible application to the film, both in approach to subject and in technical construction. The dialectic as drama is conflict and must dictate the structure of the film. The pattern-of-three arises again and again during production: in the fundamental composition of the film strip (the conflict between frame and frame, shot and shot, etc.), the building up of symphonic movement (comparative rhythms), the imagistic use of sound (two motives expressed simultaneously giving rise to a third idea), the structure of sequences and, indeed, quite possibly in the structure of the film as a whole.

The dialectic approach can, and does, govern the analysis of action in documentary. In every job undertaken, whether it is the hauling-in of fishing-nets, or the driving of a rivet, there are conflicting forces, the second arising out of the first, and from their clash results a synthesis. Into this interpretation of material,

<sup>1</sup> Preface to *Critique of Political Economy*.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, R. W. Postgate (Hamish Hamilton, 1933).

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the documentarist may, according to his character, introduce the elements of poetic imagery, dramatic tension and symphonic movement. And from one single sequence, the method may be extended to the whole.

To judge from the published versions of the scenario, the *Que Viva Mexico* film was to have taken the shape of a dialectic interpretation from an historical materialistic point of view of the past, present and supposed future of the Mexican people in a series of self-contained but dialectically interdependent episodes. The conception, according to the flimsily constructed synopsis, was of very broad dimensions, drawing on existing material, both as heritages of the past and actualities of the living present, in order to express an intellectual approach that would have lifted the film on to a high plane of creative endeavour.

Under existing conditions of production, whether for propaganda or profit, or both, there is a possibility of developing documentary on a dialectic basis in the form of a plain statement of facts, from which the audience may draw its own conclusions. It presupposes, from a propagandist point of view, a greater social and political consciousness among the people than actually exists. But the dialectic approach, it may be argued, is in any case indecisive and does not demand positive conclusions to be made on the part of the director. As such, of course, it falls outside the scope of specific propaganda. In Wright's films of the West Indies, for example, the working conditions of the negro are thrown into sharp relief with the scientific mechanisation of Western methods of banana portorage. In his *Song of Ceylon*, the traditional customs, religious ceremonies and daily husbandry are placed in juxtaposition with the demands of Western commercial methods. In both cases, the attitude is expressed by an impartial representation of the facts, implying a philosophical and not a political intention. The at-present unfinished documentary of the Vera Cruz fishermen's fight against the encroachment of vested interests, *Pescados*, produced by the Secretariat of Education of the late Mexican Government under the supervision of Paul Strand, would also seem to fall into this class of dialectic form.

### (iii) Conclusions

No matter its complexities, it is a mistake, I think, to work over a documentary film too long. Time of production—script,

shooting, sound and cutting—is naturally conditioned by the subject and economic circumstances. At the same time, if production continues over an extended period, or is interrupted by other events or films, first impulses go and the nervous strain gives rise to bad judgment. From a mentally creative aspect, the process of film-making is obviously quite different from that of literature or, for that matter, any of the other media of expression.

I do not pretend that the foregoing notes regarding practical production are exhaustive; nor do I pretend that the theories set out and discussed are fulfilled in my own attempts at production. Rather are they to be regarded as an amplification of other estimates undertaken by other and more able minds in an effort to gather together in logical ordering some of the unsorted and unframed attitudes towards this new method of film. The materials and theories of cinema change so quickly, moreover, and are so closely related to the changing events of everyday life that, unless we occasionally take stock of how things are shaping, documentary will sink into that morass of bad theory and illogical argument which characterises the story-film today. Already colour has been jockeyed into a place in the commercial cinema. Television lies ready as a further step. And we should not disregard the importance of these two new processes to the future of documentary.

Prophecy in cinema is a dangerous practice. A dozen events, economic or otherwise, may alter any theories which we may now form about colour and television. Colour has not so far entered the documentary sphere as a serious element. Television is not yet placed on a general practical basis, although that day seems near. On the other hand, nearly seven years passed after the commercial introduction of sound before we were able to use it to creative ends in documentary. Probably a similar state of affairs will arise with colour and television, but although both may ultimately mean a reorientation of technical theory, neither colour nor television is likely to change the fundamental principles of documentary as an interpretation of social relationships.

From our knowledge of the aims of commercial cinema, primarily devoted to using the film for telling stories, we may safely assume that colour plus stereoscopic effect are inevitable stages leading ultimately to television. On economic grounds, as well as to preserve its remoteness from actuality for social reasons already explained, the story-film is most likely to remain a matter

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of studio manufacture. Both stereoscopic colour and television suggest an eventual elimination of all but the simplest form of cutting (possibly just fading and mixing from one scene to another as in current radio-plays) and a reduction to the minimum of visual camera positions in a tendency towards complete theatrical representation by mechanical means. In this medium, the writer, producer and actors will play the most important parts along with the technicians in control of the mixing of sight and sound.

Despite the undeniable popular success of this kind of expression, a mixture of sound-film and stage-play, I cannot see that this move towards the realistic reproduction of what will still be artificiality will interfere with the 'creative treatment of actuality' as attempted by present documentary. Not only in its technical developments but in its subjects and styles, we must realise that the story-film is moving more and more away from reality. Nothing short of a complete social and educative upheaval due to economic pressure will alter this. Documentary and other kinds of 'real-life' expression, on the other hand, are appealing to an ever-widening market as social consciousness among the people develops. In order to serve fully that market documentary will, I feel, preserve its elements of camera mobility and flexibility of sound and visual images but, at the same time, broaden its human references. There is every indication, I believe, that the already wide divergence between the artificially-made amusement film and the creative, semi-instructional documentary method will continue to grow both in manufacture and exhibition.

To return to the present, however inadequate may be the preceding survey, at least it suggests the existence of documentary as a particular kind of film which has arisen to meet special demands. Further, if my reasoning has been sound, it gives every sign that there lies ahead of the documentary method a wide vista of development provided certain conditions are contrived. Production must be placed on a firm economic basis, for which propaganda seems a possible solution. Studio traditions and conventions must be forgotten. Distribution to both existing theatres and the important growing field of non-theatrical circulation must be organised competently and with foresight. And, above all, documentary must have its roots planted firmly in the soil of real facts and necessities. The documentary method of expression

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must be the voice of the people speaking from the homes and factories and fields of the people. As a consequence its future lies inevitably in the future of society.

Whether it be warfare or collective security, the abolition of classes or a continuance of some kind of democracy, the establishment of nationalist systems or a world of united races and peoples, or the final collapse of capitalism before the forces of socialism—documentary must always be dictated by the needs of society. What shape that society will assume lies in our own hands and it is imperative that each one of us should realise this. The documentary method is only a channel of expression. The most important question of all is: What sort of propaganda shall we allow it to project?

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## WHITHER DOCUMENTARY?

### (i) *General Developments*

As fast as world affairs have moved since the previous chapters were written in 1935, so have the weapons of propaganda been sharpened. They have been used more intensively than ever before as a preliminary step to, as well as accompaniment of, war. The electric media of expression have brought events into sharp focus before the eyes of a bewildered community. Crisis has followed crisis with such suddenness that public understanding may well have had difficulty in keeping up with events. At times, spurious facts have been given the public. At other times, real facts have been withheld. In both Britain and America, where people are still permitted to ask questions in the hope of getting an intelligible reply, there has been an increased demand for truth. The dramatic factor in presenting news has inspired fresh techniques. In America especially, most modern forms of fact communication—Radio, Press, Film and Theatre—have been used to present actualities with dramatic statement. Forms like the dynamic *Living Newspaper* technique in the theatre, the *March of Time* radio and film issues, and the best of the pictorial magazines have been given to a public of which a certain section, however gropingly, is receptive of information as distinct from entertainment.

The effect of this increased public interest to know the facts, no matter if partly the result of transient fear, should have been felt keenly in the sphere of the cinema. Yet the one branch of the film industry which we might have thought would have been quick to sense this change in public needs has failed to realise its opportunity. Perhaps it is truer to say that the opportunity has been recognised but pointedly avoided. News-reel editors maintain their policy of non-controversy, a policy given them with frankness by the President of the British Board of Film Censors at the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association's Conference, 1937.

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panded, using sponsorship as an economic basis for production. This latter fact is an outstanding characteristic of the movement. With very few exceptions, every documentary film in Britain has been made as propaganda for a Government department, some national institution or society, or one of the major industries or public utilities. Without this sponsorship, there would be no British documentary film movement, because the amount of revenue obtainable from the commercial exhibition of such short films does not permit capital investment for profit. It is not that documentary films do not get bookings in public cinemas. On the contrary, films like *Night Mail*, *Cover to Cover*, *North Sea* and *The Future's in the Air* have been booked well. It is because the average price paid by exhibitors for short films in Britain is small. Documentary films require time and experiment to make. They are not particularly cheap, except when compared with the costs of fiction films. But the experience of one or two firms has shown that it is almost impossible to make profit from an unsponsored documentary film unless its initial cost is so low that quality is jeopardised. On the other hand, the 'entertainment' appeal of many documentary films has made them popular with most audiences. That it is still difficult to find out when and where they are shown is the fault of the exhibitors, who seldom, if ever, advertise their short films by title.

The new Cinematograph Films Act of 1938 has done little to help the commercial distribution of non-fictional short films. The restrictions on subject of the old Act have been removed, but the quota figures for short films imposed on renters are so small that they make scarcely any improvement. Despite Press and Parliamentary support of documentary films, which were the only prosperous branch of the film trade when the Act was debated, the Act as passed does not reflect the Government's anxiety to encourage this kind of film-making, nor does it, for that matter, do much to aid the British film industry as a whole.

Earlier in this book I suggested that a big field for distribution of documentary films might be developed in what is known as the non-theatrical market. This, in fact, has occurred. The distribution officers at the G.P.O. Unit, the British Commercial Gas Association, G.B. Instructional, the Workers' Travel Association and the Petroleum Films Bureau can give figures of audience attendances at specially organised performances which are impressive. The Gas Industry, for example, showed its 1937-

38 programme of films to 1½ million persons, while the G.P.O. Unit reckons to have an annual audience of 2½ million persons in Great Britain. This kind of distribution is likely to maintain its growth. Sponsors and producers consider it as being as important as, if not more important than, exhibition in the ordinary cinema. In the latter, the short documentary film is, at best, a supporting item to a main feature film. However much interest an audience may take in a short film, it is the feature which it has paid to see. At a non-theatrical performance, on the other hand, an audience knows that it will see films about specific subjects. It is prepared to accept (or reject) such films without comparing them with an entertainment film. Thus we find documentary films being made specially for non-theatrical exhibition. This should not imply that their quality is less good. On the contrary, it means that a subject can be treated more profoundly and less impressionistically. Such films as *The Saving of Bill Blewitt* and *New Worlds for Old* were made with a non-theatrical audience only in mind.

In January 1936 the first company to undertake documentary film production exclusively on a sponsored basis was formed at Strand Films in London. It was followed by Realist Film Unit. There were now four units available to make documentary films in Britain, because already in operation were the G.P.O. Unit and G.B. Instructional (a branch of the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation)—the latter having specialised in making educational films since 1933. *March of Time* established a unit in London, putting production in the hands of one of the documentary people. Subsequently, the Shell Company reorganised its unit, the Progressive Film Unit was set up to make and distribute films of frank political purpose, and various independent documentary film-makers hoisted their banners.

For some time, however, it had been clear that, with the expansion of the documentary field, some kind of main advisory body was wanted to act as a consultative centre to the movement as a whole. When John Grierson resigned from the G.P.O. Unit in June 1937 he formed Film Centre to meet that need. The idea was, and still is, that Film Centre itself should not produce films, but should advise and supervise on production, make arrangements for distribution, undertake scenario work, promote new territories for production and, in general, guide the policy and purposes for most of the movement.

The increasing number of workers in documentary film pro-

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duction had also led, in 1936, to the formation of the Associated Realist Film Producers, a society of which almost every person in the British documentary film field—whether producer, director, educational officer, cameraman or distribution manager—is now a member, irrespective of what company he or she may work for. The aim is to unify the movement and preserve its democratic relationships, to eliminate unnecessary competition and to act as a public relations front for the whole documentary film movement. Associated with the Society as honorary members are leading men of science, art, music and architecture, as well as documentary producers and educationalists overseas.<sup>1</sup>

To turn to the films themselves, development of technique in the film of fact has been largely determined by change in subject-matter. Broadly speaking, there have been more attempts to humanise the documentary film. It will be remembered that the first E.M.B. films did the more or less easy job of dramatising themes of common labour. From this they turned to subjects of modern industry and tried to set man against his background of mechanical work. With steel-furnace and shipyard as that background, all too often these films were romantic in approach and impressionist in style. But with the setting up of the G.P.O. Unit subjects changed. The industrial setting gave way to the city office and business organisation, except for occasional flights with the postal-special or the radio-service. The man at the desk was a great deal harder to dramatise than the man at the blazing furnace-door. The G.P.O. Unit, nevertheless, kept up its reputation for experiment. In the last eighteen months of Grierson's supervision, the imagination of Cavalcanti and others led to many innovations in technique, especially in the use of words, sounds and music. In *Coal Face* Cavalcanti had, with the aid of Benjamin Britten, the composer, and W. H. Auden, the poet, used the sound track in a new way, a way which was to be developed with success in *Night Mail*. In the latter also, Harry Watt's handling of people was more than surface description, exemplified by his treatment of the young trainee. It was a film which has since been universally liked by all kinds of audiences. Of all the films of this period, Cavalcanti's film-talk with Mr J. B. Priestley, the novelist, *We Live in Two Worlds*, was perhaps the most technically mature. With its by-product, *Line to the Tschierova*

<sup>1</sup> The Association was suspended in the spring of 1940 and has not been revived.

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*Hut*, it was a model of shooting, editing and imaginative use of sound. Both films require several viewings to appreciate their subtle technique, which, at first sight, appears so simple.

*Night Mail* was to influence later films by others in the movement, for example, Shaw's *Cover to Cover*. It was also to give a line of development towards the use of 'story' and 'actors', a line which Cavalcanti and Watt pursued in *The Saving of Bill Blewitt* and *North Sea*. It meant the dropping almost wholly of the 'unseen' commentator and consequently a greater use of natural, direct-recorded speech. The technique has been successful in most of the subjects to which it has been applied and is the direct development of the documentary film into the fiction film field. *North Sea*, with its drama of ship-to-shore radio service, was on the verge of being a story-film. We should note, however, that this technique is most successful when subjects have in them a ready-made excitement in the shape of a storm at sea or a train at speed.

Outside the G.P.O. Unit, other developments in technique had taken place. The new subjects of education, housing, social service, public health and unemployment had set new problems of approach. The documentary film-makers were being faced for the first time with themes arising directly from the national task of social reconstruction. In 1935 Arthur Elton had made for the Ministry of Labour an unpretentious one-reel film called *Workers and Jobs*. It had in it a great deal of spontaneous, unrehearsed speech. It relied scarcely at all on the familiar technique of dramatic camerawork, constructive cutting and delivered commentary. It was, in fact, closer to being an extended news-reel item than a documentary in the then accepted sense. Shortly after, one of the same year's Gas films dealt with slum clearance and rehousing. The technicians on the job, John Taylor and Ruby Grierson, with Anstey and Elton producing, took their camera and microphone into the houses of working-class districts in South London and let the people tell their own story without prompting or rehearsal. *Housing Problems* had no fancy trimmings. It was a piece of first-hand reporting. Ruby Grierson's ability to win people's confidence gave a spontaneity and an honesty to the 'interviews' that contrasted sharply with the previous, romantic method of handling people.<sup>1</sup> Audiences

<sup>1</sup> Ruby Grierson lost her life in the S.S. *City of Benares* on September 17, 1940. She was making a film about evacuated British children en route for Canada.

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were deeply moved by the film. Its grim authenticity shocked them. It brought them, perhaps for the first time in the cinema, face to face with unpleasant facts. The term 'realist' entered the documentary vocabulary.

The fast-moving tempo of the *March of Time*, with its anxiety to find an edge to every item, was now to influence the technique of the British documentary film. Trying to put across facts in journalistic style, a film like *The Smoke Menace* showed small care for the visual importance of the medium. It used the screen as an illustration to its commentary, broken up here and there by a personal interview. It had nothing of the pictorial beauty of photography which was usually associated with documentary films. The formula, because that was all it was, succeeded in restraining the individual style of the director. It was difficult, for example, to recognise that the director who made *Song of Ceylon*, with all its sensitive beauty and inherent film qualities, could later make *Children at School*. Yet the latter became reckoned a more important film than the former. In actual fact, the British documentary people were finding that the making of films about the task of social reconstruction was a great deal harder than the dramatisation of the steel-worker and the fisherman as symbols of labour. Pictorially, most of the material itself was uninspiring. The new subjects demanded new methods of treatment; the *March of Time* style was an obvious one to borrow. *To-day We Live*, which dealt with unemployment and community living, and which also had the benefit of Ruby Grierson's handling of people, tried to develop the 'story' method as well as using the *March of Time* style to set the background to the subject. John Taylor's *Dawn of Iran*, the result of a one-man expedition (Taylor had previously worked with Flaherty on Aran, with Wright in Ceylon, and with Cavalcanti in Switzerland), frankly owed its whole approach and shape to *March of Time*; but it had a sureness of handling that the American reel sometimes lacks and better photography than most documentaries of the year.

More recently, the series planned for the Films of Scotland Committee represented a mixture of styles. Wright regained something of his cinematic quality in the deeply-emotional *The Face of Scotland*. Donald Alexander made a swift journalistic job of *Wealth of a Nation*, which was a straight development from his *Eastern Valley*. Shaw came more down to earth than before in *The Children's Story*. Mary Field took her filming of the country-

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side a step forward in *They Made the Land*, being inspired in her commentary by Pare Lorentz's *The River*.

Most important of new films, however, was John Taylor's *The Londoners*, made for the Jubilee celebrations of the London County Council by the Gas Industry. It combined commentary, verse and personal interview, but, more interesting, its first reel was largely studio work. The hovels, schools, poorhouses and sewers of the London of Dickens were restage and shot in a manner that brought to mind the studio films of the Germans at the time of Pabst's *The Joyless Street*. It had also a sense of pictorial observation, of people just watching and waiting. It had none of the breathless speed with which *March of Time* had infested some of the British documentaries. With *North Sea* and *To-day We Live*, *The Londoners* showed that the documentary film-makers could use a studio and yet avoid the artificiality so often associated with studio staging.

Space does not permit mention of the many other British films of fact made since 1935, but a word must be said of the twelve charming films of the London and Whipsnade Zoos; the films of gas, airways and oil; the many Post Office films which have displayed ingenuity and creative skill (especially Evelyn Spice's humanly observed *Job in a Million*); and the production supervisory energies of people like Arthur Elton, Stuart Legg and Cavalcanti. The work of the Progressive Film Institute with its Spanish War films has also been of interest, notably *Spanish A.B.C.* and *Behind the Spanish Lines*.

Both in its subject-matter and technique, the British documentary film has reached an interesting stage in its development. Three films now in production (on the English Press for *The Times*; on the social relations of architecture and the community for the Gas Industry, and on Health in Industry for the Post Office) may each contain new changes in technique. All three subjects are greater in scope than most earlier work. Each offers a larger expenditure than our documentary film-makers are used to having. In at least one of them it is to be hoped that a new level of quality and social significance will be reached. With the almost complete collapse of the fiction film side of the British film industry, it is often suggested that some of the documentary people should abandon their short sponsored pictures and start fiction film production. It is possible that one or two of the more experienced documentary directors could handle a feature-

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length film; but it should be remembered that, in discarding sponsorship, they will lose much of their creative freedom as well as an outlet for their social concept of film-making. Sources of finance and the executive personnel of most British studios do not inspire confidence that a documentary director would be given either the freedom of technique, or the leisure of working, to which he is accustomed. The feature film companies, on the other hand, have tried once or twice to make films of subjects that essentially called for a documentary approach. By documentary approach, I mean an understanding of ordinary people in relation to their background and social existence. But *Bank Holiday*, *Owd Bob*, *The Edge of the World* and *South Riding*, admirable as they were in endeavour, failed to be honest pictures of British life because, no matter how firmly their feet may have been planted on British soil, their actors were mostly divorced from their backgrounds. It is doubtful, also, if some of the directors of these films had a sufficiently deep sympathy with the subjects they were filming. To a documentary director it is both impossible and stupid to try to recreate the spirit of a Brighton holiday crowd in a London studio. If, and when, a documentary director attempts a full-length film with story and actors, he should be as sure as was Pabst in *Kameradschaft* that he has a subject he understands and feels, and a freedom of creation. Until he is offered these, he is surely wiser to develop this field of documentary films which he himself has built; where he has, as yet, those most precious things—time to experiment, and time to think, without the crushing burden of four-figure overheads.

Of great significance to the future of the whole documentary film movement is, I believe, the recently forged link between Great Britain and America. Three years ago, we in Britain were unaware that there was any documentary film production in the United States. Since then, it now appears that spasmodic efforts had been made for some years to establish the production of realist films away from the Hollywood sphere of influence. The Film and Photo League had, as early as 1928, busied itself with newsreels of labour conflicts, the Scotsboro boys and hunger marches. About 1931, Seymour Stern made *Imperial Valley* to show the exploitation of labour in the Californian fruit fields. Other films followed, made with little money and few resources, such as *Taxi*, *Sheriff* and *The City of Contrasts*. In 1935, the New Film Alliance was formed by a split among the members of the League and the



THE SPANISH EARTH (American 1937)  
Contemporary Historians Inc.: *directed by* JORIS IYENS



TODAY WE LIVE (British 1937)

Strand Films: *directed by* RUBY GRIERSON and RALPH BOND



THE WAVE (Mexican 1934-35)

Mexican Government: *directed by* PAUL STRAND

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new group sponsored showings of the work of Joris Ivens, freshly-arrived in America with his films *Borinage* and *New Earth*. Nykino, a branch of the old group, issued *The World Today*, a sort of *March of Time* cinemagazine, with frank Labour bias. Late in 1935, Leo Hurwitz and Ralph Steiner (a still-photographer long before interested in movies) were asked to join the Pare Lorentz unit which was about to make the first U.S. Government documentary film.

It has become convenient to say that the American film of fact began with *The Plow that Broke the Plains*, produced for the Resettlement Administration (now the Farming Security Administration) in 1936. To a certain extent this may be true. Although realist films had been made previously in the U.S., to the best of my knowledge *The Plow* was the first to use the film medium to bring alive a national subject on a sponsored basis, in the same way as had been done earlier in Britain. Pare Lorentz, a well-known movie critic, made *The Plow* with the help of an excellent unit. It included the still-photographer Paul Strand, whose Mexican film *Pescados*, later released as *The Wave*, I have mentioned earlier (p. 183). Strand's influence was clear in the opening sequences of *The Plow*, but he did not work all through the production. As a first film, it had many of the faults which we can now see were characteristic of the early British documentaries; over-complex editing, no human contact, a mannered commentary and, most guilty from a propagandist viewpoint, a tacked-on ending explaining why the film had been made. Yet *The Plow* must always rank as important, because, like *Drifters*, it pointed a way. It had vision and ambition. Its subject was visually stimulating. It showed that the documentary film was no longer the monopoly of Europe.

Joris Ivens had meanwhile located himself with the Contemporary Historians Inc., a group of intellectuals including John dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, Archibald MacLeish and Lillian Hellman. Finance was raised to send Ivens and Hemingway to Spain. They brought back material which was shaped into *The Spanish Earth*, a dramatic and human account of the Civil War. Despite the contrast between its 'acted' scenes and those shot news-reel-fashion on the spot, it was a brave piece of film-making of which Ivens had a right to be proud. Opinion was divided about Hemingway's commentary. War overseas inspired other cameramen to get material at first-hand. *Heart of*

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*Spain and China Strikes Back*, both edited by Frontier Films, a non-profit-making production group in New York, were shot on the actual location. Each suffered by not having a director in charge; but for each the editors did as good a job as the material allowed. The only film which this production group has made on American soil was *People of the Cumberland*. According to report, it dealt with the emergence of an isolated people of pioneer English and Scottish ancestry from poverty and backwardness. Unionism, currently a fighting problem in the States, played an important part in the theme. The treatment was a mixture of documentary and fictional, thus presenting presumably the same problems of handling human beings as actors with which we in this country are faced.

During the same time that a group of British documentary films were being shown in the States, under the auspices of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, Pare Lorentz's second film was released. Widely discussed in England and America, *The River* was a far more important film than *The Plow that Broke the Plains*. It had some of the same faults; lack of human beings, 'difficult' music, and again a tacked-on end with the propaganda message. (It is worth noting that both Lorentz's films carry their message in an epilogue, almost as if he was embarrassed by the propaganda; whereas, in most British documentary films, the propaganda is inherent from start to finish.) But *The River* had a bigness about it that was truly American, and a sentimentality that caused the commentary to dwell over and repeat fascinating place-names. It had moments of romantic quality which *The Plow* lacked, and sequences of visuals—such as the rain-sodden tree stumps—for which the cameramen deserve their credit. It did more to secure the popular recognition of the documentary film in America than any other picture. And, above all, it played its part in the expression of the awakening need for social reconstruction in the United States. Since then, we have heard a radio-play by Lorentz, *Job to be Done*, said to be a try-out for a new documentary film on unemployment. It was rich in human feeling, broad in concept and suggested that Lorentz's next film may reach maturity and give us the documentary film of American life for which we are waiting.

The year 1938 saw many contacts made between the two English-speaking countries in the documentary field. By a grant from the General Education Board of the Rockefeller Foundation

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(which has done much to further the educational use of the film in America), the American Film Centre was set up to advise and promote the field somewhat in the same way as Film Centre in Britain. At American Documentary Films Inc., Ralph Steiner and Willard van Dyke (who photographed on *The River*) have founded a production unit which is making *The City* from a script by Pare Lorentz. For this film, material is being shot in Britain by our technicians, while the American group has shot a sequence on American roads for inclusion in an English film on road transport. British documentary people visit the States to lecture and show films; Americans visit our units. By widening viewpoints and teaching fresh attitudes, it is possible that this exchange of personnel and films may play an important part in the future of the documentary film in both democracies. Producers of each country have things to learn from the other; that is, if each is prepared to take criticism in the spirit in which it is made.

I say this advisedly because some of the documentary people appear to be sensitive because the documentary film has become accepted as a product firstly associated with Britain. That this is historically incorrect may be seen from the different schools of documentary film-makers given earlier (Chapter 2), as well as from the Appendix of films. The point is that in Britain, the documentary film, as a dramatic statement of real life, has been developed more widely *as a movement* than elsewhere. As a result, the British output has been more prolific than that of countries where production has so far been spasmodic and individualistic. We in Britain have, from the outset, reckoned the movement of greater importance than the separate achievements of its individual exponents. We have, also, always held the belief that there is need for the dramatic factor in education and have tried to use the stimulating devices of the film to that end perhaps more widely than have other countries. Most of our films have been made specifically for showing to British audiences. Each film has met a need, some more useful than others, but not necessarily a need that exists overseas. Where they have been shown abroad, their producers have accepted the compliment that their work was thought of international interest. Thus I see small purpose served by contrasting a film like *The River* with a film like *North Sea*. Each was made with a different aim; each bore national characteristics peculiar to its subject. Neither was 'better' nor 'worse' than the other, except when judged on

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technical grounds. Such judgment is of secondary importance and, in any case, purely personal. We, in Britain, may make more documentary films than do other nations at the present time, but that is not to say that these films are superior to others. It means only that our films are penetrating deeper into public life because we have, to date, been able to maintain a continuity of production and thus develop a movement of film-makers which must make its weight felt more than individual production. Partisan criticism that British documentary films are not sufficiently 'political' in character is a criticism that could only be made by an observer ignorant of the wider issues which are the aim of the British documentary people.

Outside the English-speaking democracies, no other nation has developed the art of the documentary film to great purpose except a vigorous, although small, movement in Czechoslovakia prior to the Munich Pact. A typical film of this group was Jiri Weiss's *Our Country*, impressionist in treatment but very well shot and cut, with a poetic commentary. At one time producing interesting work, the French have shown us very little in recent years, possibly because their fiction film production has undergone a healthy renaissance. Jean Tedesco's *Magie du Fer-Blanc* was amusing and ingenious but did nothing fresh. Kirsanov's *Visages de France* and Maurice Cloche's *Terre d'Amour* were, in effect, glorified travelogues beautifully photographed but without deeper meaning. There are small but enthusiastic documentary film movements in Holland and Belgium. In the former, Mannus Franken, once a collaborator with Ivens, has made *Redding* and *De Trekschuit* and is now at work in the Dutch East Indies. Worth note, also, was Gerard Rutten's *Dood Wasser*, a full-length picture with story and natural actors that had considerable character and strength. In Belgium, Henri Storck combined story with reality in his *Les Maisons de la Misère*, a film of slums and rehousing schemes: while Charles Dekeukelaire made *Chanson de Toile de Lin*, a film dealing with the flax and linen industry. From Egypt came an intelligently made documentary of a forbidden desert town, *Siwa*, directed by Victor Stoloff. It was his first film and revealed much promise. His handling of native actors was well controlled and the technique exciting. Stoloff had, however, made an intensive study of British and French documentary films before starting on his expedition.



THE PLOW THAT BROKE THE PLAINS (American 1936)  
U.S. Government: *directed by* PARE LORENTZ



THE 400,000,000 (American 1938-39)  
Contemporary Historians Inc.: *directed by* JORIS IVENS



THE LONDONERS (British 1939)  
Realist Film Unit: *directed by* JOHN TAYLOR

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From Germany came two documentaries which gained in length what they may have lost in subtlety. Of the two Leni Reifenstahl films, *Triumph of the Will* and *Olympia: Fest der Völker*, only the first was shown privately in England and America. At first viewing, its size and stridency were overwhelming. At second viewing, its technical defects emerged. At third viewing, it was possible to realise how much it depended for effect on crowd spectacle and sound. At the fourth viewing, you asked what was the Nazi Conference about and who, anyway, was conferring? Mechanically, the film was very well photographed, but the editing was of the news-reel standard. Yet *Triumph of the Will* was unique in film history as a dramatised account of a fictional spectacle organised for propaganda. No effort was spared in staging the conference at Nuremberg, 5-10 September 1934, so that a film should be made of an event that for mass-parade surpassed any Hollywood super-film. Hitler in person supervised the production. Thirty-six cameras shot it. Millions of feet of negative were exposed. The result was sheer tedium.

In 1933, Goebbels visited Italy to study propaganda methods and the same year Walther Ruttmann made *Acciaio*, a film of the Italian steel industry (see pp. 88, 100). Subsequently he made further 'City Symphonies', modelled on his *Berlin*, for Dusseldorf and Cologne, and another steel film in Germany which, for all its lovely photography, had no articulation and was wholly superficial. From Italy we have seen films such as *The Path of the Heroes*, which purported to tell the Italian view of the Ethiopian massacre, and a number of well-made travel films for tourist propaganda. From the U.S.S.R. nothing important of a documentary nature has been exported to Britain and information is increasingly difficult to obtain. *Abyssinia* gave an opposite viewpoint to *The Path of the Heroes*. The London Film Society had the brilliant idea of running alternate reels from both films.

Thus, so widely has the motion picture been employed as a medium of political and social propaganda that it can no longer be said, as the Trade would like the public to believe, that the film is just a 'form of entertainment'.

### (ii) Policies and Purposes

'To Whitman it appeared that democracy was not merely a form of government. "If ever accomplished," he said, "it will be at least as much

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*(I think likely double as much) the result of democratic literature and arts (if we get them) as of democratic parties." It seemed to him that democracy must have its own art, its own poetry, its own schools, and even its own "sociologies".*

American Political Ideas: 1865-1917.  
Professor Charles E. Merriam.

There comes a time in every movement, whether political, artistic or scientific, when its exponents take stock of their work. For almost ten years in Britain the money of Government departments, of big industrial corporations, of national institutions, and other official and unofficial bodies, has been spent in making several hundred realist films. These have been described as, on the one hand, 'pictures of glue factories by night, photographed wrong-way up, with crude Russian music' by that learned historian Mr Philip Guedalla; and, on the other, in such terms as 'A great public has now been won for films of this kind, in which the British school is pre-eminent. Essentially the art of producing a documentary film is the art of skilled and faithful reporting depending for its success upon the ability to use the camera to build up an interesting and dramatic picture of the life led and the work done in the world of everyday reality. . . .'<sup>1</sup> The word 'documentary' itself has come into current use by the Press and the radio, implying 'a dramatic statement of facts'. From its humble origin in a small cutting-room to a movement producing upward of fifty films a year, the British documentary film has been shaped into a form of expression which has attracted the attention of Parliament, Press and public.

Now it is obvious that if all these films, made on a sponsored basis, have fulfilled only the demands of plain advertisement, they would neither have drawn national and international recognition, nor would their production have called for creative endeavour. For some time it has been clear to outside observers that the philosophy of the documentary film lay deeper than the satisfaction of a film well made or an advertisement well planned. Their producers have stated that they believe their films have had a social and educative value which has taken shape as the movement itself has grown. As an influence in national life, documentary films are today reckoned of some potent force by

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 23 November, 1935.

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those whose job it is to guide the national welfare. How, we may ask, is this influence making itself felt?

There are many people who deeply believe that the welfare of the nation is not safe if its control is vested wholly in a few appointed leaders, who have the power to act without the authority and co-operation of the great mass of the community. They maintain still that the people have the sole and free right to elect their government and that that government is open to criticism. But events suggest that the position into which democracy has been let slide, the position which makes it open to attack, is that many persons do not make use of their right or their responsibility to authorise their leaders. This may, of course, well be because precedent has shown that those leaders, when appointed, do not fulfil the purposes for which they were selected. Most people will agree that social reform is necessary but few retain the belief, granted that they ever had it, that they can help to promote it. We in Britain are so rich in voluntary services that the State is permitted to avoid many jobs which it is rightfully its duty to fulfil. On the other hand, this lack of responsibility may suggest that a large part of the community is indifferent to the interest and benefit it could derive from the effective democratic working of the country. We should remember, however, that to many people the right to vote is a comparatively new right. It is not yet twenty years since every adult man and woman in Britain was given the rights of British citizenship.

Thus it looks as if the democratic system might be running down partly because people themselves no longer believe that they have the power to effect change and to bring about improved social conditions. In the first chapter, I said that the educational system of Britain has little relevance to the important social tasks of our generation. The gap between classroom and the outside world still exists. That this breakdown in the educational system is being realised seems clear from the following conclusion in the recently issued *Report of the Consultative Committee on Secondary Education* by the Board of Education: 'The existing arrangement for the whole-time education of boys and girls above the age of 11+ in England and Wales have ceased to correspond with the actual structure of modern society and with the economic facts of the situation.' To some of us it is clear that, if we rely on the present inadequate methods of teaching the

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duties and privileges of citizenship to the community, we may wait for ever to get an articulate, well-informed population. Sooner or later, we who are concerned with the successful working of a democratic system must face the fact that there is not, and there never has been, any real education in democracy for the people in the wide sense. What knowledge people have, they have found out for themselves. In short, we as a democratic nation are confronted with the immediate task of imparting a knowledge of citizenship in order to prevent the success of the easily acceptable appeal of a different system of government.

It is the belief of the documentary film-makers that their medium could play an influential part in this interpretative task. More than any other form of expression, the film has the dramatic power to capture the imagination of those people who will not read the serious part of a newspaper and who seldom attend a public meeting. The documentary method in films has shown that it could be used to explain, vividly and indelibly, the meaning of democratic citizenship at its best. It could describe, simply but none the less stimulatingly, how a citizen might be active to promote social reconstruction in the life of his own village, town and country. It could be used to bridge the many gaps that exist between group and group in modern society. Some of the present British documentary films try to do this, because the social concept has always been kept uppermost in the minds of their producers. Wherever a sponsored subject has offered a social approach, that approach has been taken. In this way, small though it may have been, the film of fact has already done something towards this national task of teaching social responsibility.

But what has been done, has been done only for a few sectionalised interests. The films which we can show are only fragments of the national life. The documentary film has been explored only along those lines which its sponsors have commissioned; although let it be said that those sponsors have, in many cases, been imaginative in their viewpoint. This movement for education in democracy has been the result of amateur, not professional educationalists. The producers of British documentary films lay no claim to be politicians, or even diplomats. Their job is the job of making films; but because their films are about real people and their ways of living, they cannot, even if they would, escape participation in the present efforts to improve the working of democracy.

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Now let us look at the methods of those who repudiate the democratic system. Totalitarian propaganda is based on a single idea, and, because of it, is the more powerful. It asks for an unquestioning obedience by the individual in the interests of the State. It thereby relieves the individual of all the obligations of citizenship save that of acquiescence. The State and its leaders do all the social thinking which, in democracy, is demanded of the individual.

Possibly the propaganda of the fascist nations is successful in its crudity only because it has met with little or no organised propaganda from the democracies. Democracy has so far presented its case (where it has done so) disjointedly, divided and without a clear-cut purpose. Democracy has up till now made little use of propaganda as an instrument of education. It is now put on trial by the fascist states. They denounce it as out-of-date, weak and unworkable in the present state of world affairs. Fascism has issued a challenge which cannot be ignored if we value the future safety of this and coming generations. The challenge demands an answer in strong terms.

But the answer cannot be made in terms of the old nineteenth-century concept of liberal democracy. It should be stated in terms of a new twentieth-century concept of social democracy in the working. 'Democracy is thought,' writes Thomas Mann, 'but it is thought related to life and action.'<sup>1</sup> Daily it becomes more urgent that democracy should publicise that, in the light of changing social and economic events, democracy also is reshaping its methods. In the face of attack, democracy must realise that it has no right to take itself for granted. No longer can the Briton sit back and say, in Mr Priestley's words in *English Journey*, 'Damn you, I'm all right!' Those of us who reckon our democratic ideals worth preserving and improving must discard the old attitude of *laissez faire*. The democracy we publicise must be a new democracy, reorientated and revitalised, with new methods and ways of carrying out changes; a democracy, as John Grierson has it, in its working clothes and with its sleeves rolled up.

And in making its answer, democracy has the advantage of its violent critics. Mass-opinion can be moulded by the bludgeon methods of fascism only for a short time. A tattoo or a parade, a conference at which no one confers, leave little after-impression except that of sore feet and tired eyes. The democracies have

<sup>1</sup> *The Coming Victory of Democracy* (Secker & Warburg, 1938).

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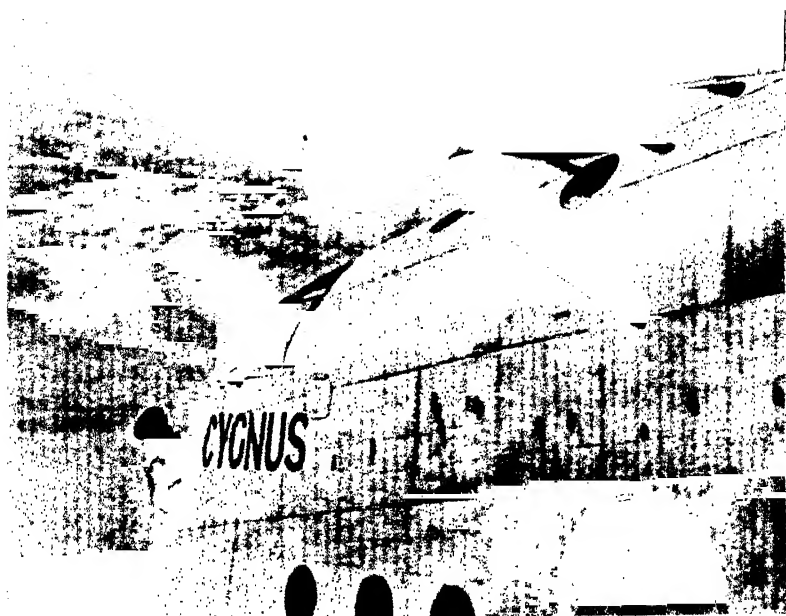
things to give that the fascist nations lack: honesty of purpose, freedom of thought and a youthfulness that comes from human feeling. To put this case, the democracies have many creative and intellectually minded persons at their command. Rashly the fascist states have purged themselves of most creative minds. Their films, their books, their paintings are, for the most part, of the vulgar kind. Their appeal is to the least educated of people. That, from a democratic viewpoint, is their main danger and that is why there is this present urgent need for wide, constructive education in democracy. In that work the Film Industry as a whole could, if it wished, play its part, a part which the documentary people have already tried to play.

The past three years have, at any rate, made one thing clear. No government can now afford to neglect the fact that the cinema is 'by far the most potent medium by which a nation can disseminate its characteristic ideas in the popular mind throughout the world.'<sup>1</sup> As I wrote in *The Film Till Now*, and again in *Celluloid*, America was the first nation to recognise the influence of the film medium as a means of propaganda. In the immediate post-War years, the Americans shrewdly regarded every foreign cinema in which their films were shown as an ambassadorial outpost for trade. Today, we are faced with a growing political propaganda issuing from states whose declared aim it is to see every kind of democracy destroyed. By radio, by leaflet, by newspaper, by film, the democratic ideal is being ridiculed and undermined. Britain, as the nation most deliberately attacked, is only now becoming aware that its world prestige can be, and has been, shaken. Britain, oldest democracy of them all, is only now conscious that it, too, must make use of the most modern instruments of propaganda in its resistance to fascist attack.

Through various Governmental committees and associations—the Vansittart Co-ordinating Committee, the British Council for Relations Abroad, The Travel and Industrial Development Association and the much-discussed Joint Films Committee set up by the Department of Overseas Trade—there slowly emerges a concept of propaganda for democracy which does not invite the confidence of all—least of all many of the makers of documentary films. Uncertain what to project—they all use Sir Stephen Tallents' word<sup>2</sup>—it is possible that they may rely on the

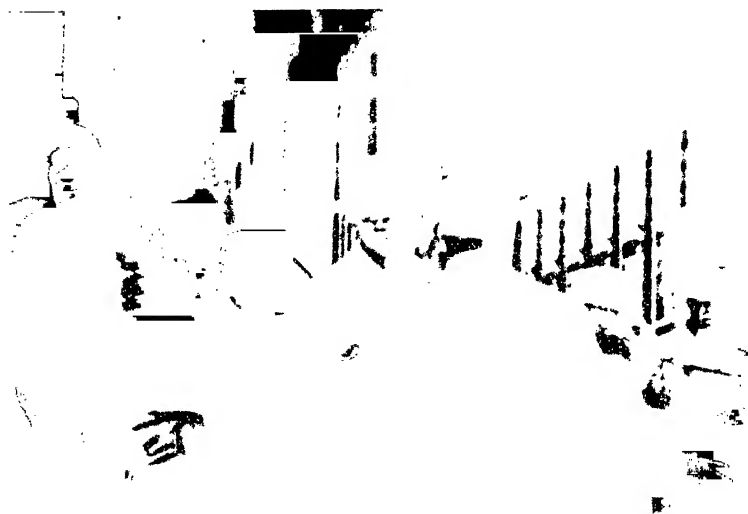
<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 8 December, 1938.

<sup>2</sup> *The Projection of England*, Sir Stephen Tallents (Faber & Faber, 1932).



THE FUTURE'S IN THE AIR (British 1937)

Strand Films: *directed by* ALEXANDER SHAW



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THE CITY (American 1939)

American Documentary Films Inc.: *directed by* RALPH STEINER



WHY WE FIGHT SERIES (American 1942-44)  
Orientation Branch of U.S. War Department. Supervision: Col. FRANK CAPRA

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time-worn symbols of Merrie England. They may forget (or perhaps they realise?) that democracy is changing, forget that the only way in which democracy can counter fascist ridicule is by showing democracy socially alive, rejuvenated and, above all, progressive. It is not just that the old symbols are obsolete, but that they might be used without regard for the truth for which they stand. Pomp and circumstance may, in some opinions, have their prestige value overseas; but the life-guardsmen of Whitehall and the beef-eaters of the Tower are no more honest symbols of modern Britain than the figure of Britannia, unless they are presented in their true perspective.

Now we, as a nation, can only judge ourselves on our own performance, and other nations can only judge us by our own evaluation. If we rely on the past for our symbols of propaganda for democracy, we deserve to be rated the backward nation which the fascists describe. On the other hand, there can be no place for the hysterical methods of the totalitarian nations in our constructive propaganda. The task of British documentary film propaganda is a long-range task. Our interpretative method, we believe, will stay the course firmer and strike deeper than the drum-roll slogans of this party or that. Exciting, ebullient uses of propaganda are an easy temptation to the exhibitionist. The solid, less vociferous ends of education in dramatic form are, in the main count, the only ends which the documentary people can serve with an honest and decent conscience.

Our propaganda for democracy has got to have in it a description of what Britain is doing, and might do, about the organisation of social life to still better ends. It has got to reflect, as Grierson has put it, 'the conscience of a free people facing up realistically, methodically and of its own free will to its daily problems'.<sup>1</sup> These problems, we should bear in mind, are not always peculiar to ourselves. America today, for example, looks to Britain for a lead in many of its own social problems, problems which we in Britain are supposed to have fought and won years ago, problems of the right to unionise, the abolition of child labour and the spread of social services. The Americans today are fighting a great war of social reconstruction in their own country, a war in which the frontiers, in the words of Mrs Flanagan, the National Director of the Federal Theatre Project, are 'against disease, dirt, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, despair,

<sup>1</sup> *The Spectator*, 11 November, 1938.

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and at the same time against special privilege, selfishness and social apathy'. America expects, and has every right to expect, Britain to show clearly before the rest of the world what kind of democracy it is in which it believes. In the world today, it is often said that liberty and democracy are synonymous because liberty of a kind survives only in those countries which have retained democracy. We should be careful, however, to see that it is the kind of democracy in which we, as a free-thinking people, place our trust before we give it the dramatic power of stimulation which is the strength of the documentary film.

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### (i) *The General Scene*

by SINCLAIR ROAD

#### *Introduction*

Documentary film-making grew originally out of a world in depression. It attracted to its ranks people who were conscious of the muddles, the wrongs and the shortcomings, and who found in its practice something more important and satisfying than the private worlds into which so many artists and writers had retired. It had its idealism; at the same time it was practical in its objectives. It offered scope for creative experiment without degenerating into mere virtuosity. It had a collective purpose but it was not just a movement of protest. By contrast, writers like Auden, Isherwood and Spender in Britain, Malraux in France, Silone in Italy, became militant denunciators of the evils of their time under the pressure of the same events. Yet the unity which linked them together proved to be insecure and shortlived. With the end of the Spanish Civil War which had been a major focus of artistic as well as political attention, with Munich and the Russo-German pact, it collapsed along with the other popular fronts, to be followed by a series of forced marches which were to lead in individual cases to mystic retreats and even to outright alliances with the opposing political camp.

The foundations on which the documentary movement was built were of different stuff. They found an accord with the deeper social and technological requirements of the time and in this sense have had far greater permanence. They were only political in that the degree of political sanction, existing in a given country at a given time, determines the extent to which one can speak of things that might or could be and still get a majority hearing. What at times has been claimed a weakness was in fact the major strength of documentary film-making—namely,

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the system of sponsorship under which it has been developed. The fact that a sponsor is prepared to back a given subject, and a particular approach to that subject, is in a sense sufficient guarantee that a need for it exists and with that need a public. There is always a place and a function for the overt individual protest like Ivens's *Spanish Earth* (1937) or, more recently, *Indonesia Calling* (1946), but it has remained subsidiary to the main purpose. In the same way ultimate achievement has been noticeably greatest in those countries in which the personalities of individual film-makers have been related to a wider collective purpose. At the same time it is an essential criterion of health that any organisation should be flexible enough to contain a lunatic fringe—the people with the odd obsessions with the technicalities of the medium and its more novel uses.

Although sponsorship by Governments, by industry and by public bodies generally, has continued to provide the key to creative opportunity, documentary film-making has had to face new problems since 1939, and meet them at a deeper level. In Britain, at least, all the advantages possessed by a young movement passed with the war—the tolerance of critics, the enthusiastic support of the opinion-forming minority whose favours tend so often to be capriciously dispensed and change with the changing fashions. The finding of new perspectives on the contemporary scene and the discovery of new images and new styles best able to excite the interest of audiences, this is the challenge which has continually to be met. With the war's end this challenge was most acute. But the fact that documentary film-making has spread in the intervening years to every continent is the best evidence that it still has much to give.

The experience of the past decade is by no means of parochial interest only. In the development of documentary film-making there are conclusions to be drawn of wider validity. Because films are more obviously an industry and involve considerable sums of money for their production, matters of finance and organisation have been pushed into the foreground. Because Governments have used documentary films increasingly in their information services, questions of State organisation and control have been uppermost. Because the film is more clearly a group medium, the question of collective endeavour has been a constant concern, both in organising production and in securing the most effective public distribution. In fact these issues are common to all the

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arts. For a variety of reasons the film, particularly the documentary film, has had to face their implications earlier.

### *The Documentary Idea Today*

The first edition of this book in 1936 set down what were the original aims and purposes of documentary film-making and where it found its theoretical and artistic roots. The debt on the technical side to the early Soviet cinema in particular is expressly stated; the debt to the general progressive spirit of the 'thirties is implicit. But what originally gave the movement in Britain particular strength was its simultaneous passion for the cinema and for education in the widest sense, as well as the urge to better social conditions. In one way documentary film-making in Britain was as much an *avant-garde* movement as the French. At the same time, its sense of purpose and direction prevented it from finishing, as all *avant-gardes* tend to conclude after a few brief years of hectic fun, in a puff of thin smoke. And it was not only a sense of purpose but also a real insight into the cinema and a robust conviction that there was a wealth of life, and even wisdom, amid all the vulgarity and ballyhoo. To see this, one only has to look back over the pages of *Cinema Quarterly* and *World Film News*. There was plenty of hard-hitting because there was plenty to hit at and plenty to hit for. The film was a young medium and a compelling one. It could show old truths with new faces. It was exciting; it was alive. By contrast the other and more traditional arts at the time were stiff and complicated and obsessed with private mysteries. Because the film was newer and only part explored, it was in some ways easier in film to awaken a new interest in people for the things in their daily life they so take for granted. These things could have new meaning; the mail-train and the cable-ship, the pithead and the shipyard, could become symbols of a new unity. They were also good film material; they had power, they were capable of moving the emotions and they had an aesthetic quality.

Implicit, not in this idea but in the practice of it, there is, however, an underlying tension which has come more and more to the surface in recent years though it has been there all the time. Was the ultimate objective to be a purposive one, in an educational sense, or aesthetic? This argument goes to the roots of much of the present conflict of opinion about the objectives of

documentary film-making today, and the directions in which it has been moving since 1939. It centred around Flaherty originally, and to a lesser extent the symphonic school, the Ruttmanns and others. The appearance of Cavalcanti's *Film and Reality*—not always accepted for what it was, a purely personal selection—brought it to a head again in 1942. Rossellini and the Italians revived the conflict in a somewhat confused form after the war, while Sucksdorff added fuel to the embers of the Ruttmann school.

There is one side of documentary, and it is not bound by frontiers, which is concerned with developing through the film a new practice of civic education and which finds its logical outlets in the public service (which in a majority of countries is increasingly the Government service), and must operate within the limits which this service imposes. The creative restrictions involved are fairly obvious. There is the other side which may find an initial interest in the theory, but in practice is far more exclusively concerned with personal aesthetic fancies. But since sponsorship is in this case, too, the only continuously available source of finance, the frustrations on this side are even greater. It is a moot point, however, in the complaints which have been raised to the sky against unimaginative supervision and unintelligent use of the film-maker's skill, whether the protest is really justified, or whether it merely disguises a secret hankering after some nineteenth century individualist retreat and a vague determination to indulge private notions and personal tricks of style, however irrelevant these may be to the sponsor's purposes. Nor in this case is the problem to be solved by turning eyes of longing towards the feature film industry.

In Britain, the possibilities of the so-called feature documentary after the war were grossly over-rated, largely because of a more or less overt desire to escape from the system of sponsorship. Ostensibly, the call was for more humour, more liveliness, more personal dramatisation. In fact there was often little evidence, among the protagonists of this solution, of any drive to find humour, liveliness and a dramatic quality in the subjects they had to deal with. They wanted somehow to hang these missing attributes on the outside like Christmas tree decorations. Moreover, as a number of them were to discover, the creative and economic opportunities available in the feature film industry, though undoubtedly different, could also be vastly more inhibiting.

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Fundamentally, the argument has little to do with personal sentiment—political or aesthetic:

‘It was in its educational interpretation and not in its political or aesthetic interpretation that the documentary film “met a felt want” and was therefore financeable. The point is of great importance in presenting the documentary film as a fundamental contribution to Government information and to educational theory. It was financeable because on the one hand it met the felt want of Government for a colourful and dramatic medium which would interpret the information of State; and on the other hand it met the felt want among educators for a colourful and dramatic medium which would interpret the nature of the community. One provided the audience, the other the sponsorship; and the economic circle was complete from the beginning.’<sup>1</sup>

If it is in the nature of our times for the planning and control of larger and larger areas of economic and social life to pass to big organisations, and also to Governments, then the logic of this argument becomes even stronger. This, in fact, is the sense of the radical change which is taking place in the character and function of patronage generally. The subsequent chapter will show the extent to which this change is mirrored in the documentary film production of different countries, and the relative success with which the underlying tension between the public and the purposive approach of documentary has been reconciled with the individual and the aesthetic, without which—despite all the flame and fury of conflicting schools of opinion—no creative enterprise can have any value.

Since the war, the British school—which has consistently pioneered the broader educational thesis of what documentary should be about—has been under periodic attack for the more calvinistic extremes of this approach. But reorientation is not easily achieved in a world in which, despite the peace, nations find it so difficult to speak to nations, and national unities imposed by the last war fall apart. The present problems of documentary film-making are not the sole products of its own shortcomings, they inevitably reflect the social, cultural and economic thinking of the time. In the ‘thirties there were issues to be fought over, spotlights to be turned on the slums, malnutrition, bad schools, unemployment. Today, the urge for reform has dimmed, and with it the incentive to make films to inspire action.

<sup>1</sup> *Grierson on Documentary* (Collins, 1946), p. 222.

Instead there is the parrot cry for information, the last resort of Dickens's McChokumchild School:

'Now what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing else but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them.'

Until, under Mr Bounderby's exhortations, the poor dears' heads begin to burst and they start asking awkward questions and arrive at even more awkward answers, including live doubts whether the educator knows his own business.

If anything still holds good, when film industries themselves in so many countries are hitching in their belts, it is that documentary must still fight to find what are the real public needs, for the finding of them provides the economic opportunities. Logically this work must precede any disquisitions on style or technique, though ultimately the two become inseparable. The artless poetic commentary, the dramatic montage of wheels and yet more wheels, life on the diagonal against the sky, the gawky staged interview, are not merely devices worn thin with use, although they can still fool many a film critic. They represent techniques inappropriate to the present mood and the subjects which need making. Maybe the individual human story has been rated too low. Perhaps the place of natural sound has been too much ignored. Perhaps new variations on the editorial *March of Time* style will develop for the cinemas with the coming of television and the decline in the news-reel's importance. But all these things depend on a correct interpretation of contemporary needs and opportunities, in terms both of sponsorship and of audience, and on that interpretation depends the vitality with which any subject is treated and the success of its appeal.

This business of interpretation enters in at all points. In particular, it is the ability to interpret convincingly what is increasingly the business of the expert, which determines the status both of the individual film-maker and the organisation of which he is part. J. B. Priestley has said that, 'an artist has to be a technician' but he has also to be something more than a technician'.<sup>1</sup> At the moment there is a grave danger of the documentary film-maker turning out something less. The danger was there from the beginning but it has become more acute. There

<sup>1</sup> *The Arts under Socialism*, J. B. Priestley (Turnstile Press, 1947).

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are today, in a majority of countries, permanent peace-time film information services. Yet other countries have fully nationalised film industries. Whatever the relative differences, one common problem at least exists. Under such conditions the creative worker can easily lose any effective part in determining what shall be said and how it shall be said. This is not meant in narrow, individual terms, but collectively. Unless, for example, a Government Film Office has some power of initiation over its film programme, it quickly finds itself in the position of having to work within the narrow requirements of individual ministries. This can mean not only a real danger of losing the wider national perspectives, but an ever greater concentration on the more specialised instructional and informational films. If at this level there is no initiative allowed and therefore no authority, the whole creative side of film-making loses status proportionately. By being subordinated to the departmental expert, which is what this means in effect, the film-maker is easily stripped of any power of interpretation not only of subject-matter but of the actual medium itself. The expert will in effect direct the film.

In broad terms, this is probably one of the biggest differences between the present and the pre-war documentary scene. In the 'thirties, when the movement was growing and the whole idea was fresh and new, the emphasis was on finding sponsors who would support a certain kind of approach to certain kinds of subject. Today, despite the recession in sponsorship in some countries, there are many sponsors with regular film programmes and far more definite ideas of their own about the kind of films required to support this or that policy. In this context the film-maker has increasingly less opportunity of making his contribution to the job of interpreting the kind of subjects which are needed. The challenge to his abilities and imagination is much less direct. Production can become a dull routine, with the dullness reflected in the quality of the films produced.

Set against this, there are shortcomings to be chalked up against the film-maker. The subjects of pre-war were also difficult to 'bring alive'. But, as emerges clearly from the earlier pages of this book, the task was tackled with a will because the job of educating people to the realities of their lives mattered a great deal. Since the war there has been overmuch protest against the domination of the expert and the dullness of the subjects he has to offer. But unless documentary can give these subjects a bright

new shine, what has documentary to offer Governments in the present state of their informational needs, what inspiration can it give to its audiences?

These are some of the general problems. No country has a monopoly of them, just as no country today can afford not to concern itself with the need for national projection and with the documentary use of film for that purpose. The last ten years are in fact the story of how that idea has taken root in every continent.

### *The Government Approach to Sponsorship*

In the last decade sponsorship has continued in all countries to provide the main economic opportunity for documentary film production. The volume of films produced under this system has increased enormously with growing emphasis on the part played by Governments. The need was reinforced by the greater urgency of war and the practice has continued. Today every country which has film-making resources has also, in some degree or other, Government sponsorship of films. One of the most compelling motives on the part of Governments has been the growing need to project the life and work of its people, in the sense in which Sir Stephen Tallents first used the term in his *Projection of England*.<sup>1</sup> Fifteen years later, the attitude of peoples and Governments had changed to such an extent that the poet, Archibald MacLeish, at the time in charge of Cultural Affairs in the U.S. Department of State, could write:

'Governments which continue to conduct their foreign affairs on the theory that the only responsibility of Governments as regards information about foreign affairs is the responsibility to answer press questions at conferences and to respond to press attacks where silence is no longer feasible, are practising the kind of obscurantism which may deceive the official mind but will deceive no other. The great ventilating activity of mass-communication will go forward with as little regard for theories as the tides of the British Channel are alleged to have had for the theories of King Canute.'<sup>2</sup>

The need to bring into play the work of mass-communication

<sup>1</sup> *The Projection of England*, Sir Stephen Tallents (Faber and Faber, 1932).

<sup>2</sup> Introduction to *The Cultural Approach*, Ruth McMurray and Muna Lee (University of North Carolina Press, 1947).

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in the conduct of home affairs, is an equally necessary corollary of MacLeish's argument, though often unappreciated in his own country.

When one considers the influence of the press, radio and film in formulating local as well as world opinion, no country can afford to be without access to the machinery of modern communication. Countries with small populations, and especially those belonging to small language groups, are particularly affected. Above all, this is the case with films. Since the coming of sound, many small countries have been denied access not only to the world's cinemas but also to their own. In the early days of the silent cinema Danish feature films dominated Northern Europe. The Nordisk Film Studios in Copenhagen are, in fact, the oldest still in existence in Europe. But with the emergence of sound and the re-introduction of language barriers, Danish feature production was stifled and Danish films accordingly obtained a very small showing. In the documentary film, however, Denmark has found in the last ten years both a medium for re-establishing its national prestige in the cinema and a form of production which was economically feasible. Today, the Danish documentary school is one of the liveliest and most successful in Europe. But there is a final point to the story. It was necessary for the Danish Government itself to take the initiative and to provide, through sponsorship, the economic basis for its operation.

In other words, the economic facts of the documentary situation have been little changed over the past twenty years. However wide the showing which a documentary film may achieve in public cinemas, it still cannot normally recover its costs from commercial distribution. So long as the major proportion of the box-office takings are allocated to the feature film—and with costs rising in most countries the proportion steadily increases—the short film, whether it is a documentary, a travelogue or a cartoon, is still regarded as a 'fill-up' worth only the odd pound per booking. Even Disney, today, cannot make his short cartoons pay.

All these different pressures have urged Governments into film-making. But the methods they have adopted in organising their creative enterprises have varied considerably from country to country. In a majority of cases official film organisations have grown up within the framework of Departments of Information. Occasionally, Ministries of Education are selected to oversee film

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affairs. In the case of Denmark the responsible department is somewhat oddly the Ministry of Justice! From these bodies the film agencies receive their policy directives and through them they are answerable to parliaments. In size and structure, however, there are wide organisational differences. In some cases, the film section is concerned solely with administration. In France, for instance, it has no creative staff and no functional services, either of production or distribution, under its direct control. It is literally a film office and tends to be treated as such by the French film industry. Films are made under contract by private companies but they are sporadic and few in number. The finance available and therefore the scale of operation is in fact too restricted to achieve any real measure of national projection, or even to assist the maintenance of a stable documentary film industry.

The United States presents a much more uneven picture. The Office of War Information, established in 1942, was disbanded under Congressional and film industry pressure immediately the war ended and its film-making activities, which even in war had been slanted principally to the requirements of relations overseas, were stopped. Today, there is no central Government film agency. The State Department has a Film Section, partly inherited from the O.W.I., and partly from the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. This branch is responsible for the production of an increasing number of films designed to project American life abroad; but the considerable latitude it enjoys is mainly a by-product of the 'cold war' and Congressional reactions to its implications. A few domestic departments, like Agriculture, continue to initiate some instructional films, but in general there is no official policy about using films for information, or any liaison on this point between the different Government agencies. The skilled teams of documentary film-makers, which had been built up during the war and were responsible for so many valuable films, were broken up and left to find a living where best they could. With their going, a medium which could have been of great importance to the people of the U.S.A. in the immediate post-war world lost a very great deal of its power.

Britain, on the other hand, has had a continuous tradition of official film-making for the past twenty years, and since 1939 it has been centralised in a single department. Although it lost the

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ministerial status which it enjoyed during the war and the relative freedom of an annual block vote, the Central Office of Information remains the central agency for all departmental film activity and through its Films Division combines both administrative and creative services. It has in the Crown and Colonial Film Units its own production agencies, though it also uses private production companies. A complete non-theatrical distribution service—comprising lending libraries, mobile projection units and local film offices—is also maintained.

The scale of the British operation is big enough to make a large contribution to the Government information services and a considerable impact on the film industry as a whole. Centralising as it does all creative Government film activities, the Central Office has the power to give direction. It has the functional responsibilities and creative personnel necessary for authority and prestige. It combines production and distribution under one head—an important factor in trying to ensure that the films produced are shown in the most effective way. On the other hand, because the Office lacks direct ministerial representation, it is too far removed from Government policy-making. For all practical purposes the arbiter of policy since the war has been the Treasury and the criterion one of finance alone. Also, the Office has no power of initiation. As a result, it has been put in the position of a servicing agency, working to the orders of individual Ministries, chiefly concerned with short-term objectives—lending a hand on the land at harvest time, preventing accidents in the factory, or defeating diphtheria. As a result, the execution of an overall, long-term national film programme has been seriously inhibited.

Official experiments in Britain and the British Commonwealth have, nevertheless, contributed a great deal to the practice of Government film-making. The further example of Canada is particularly instructive. Created in 1940 out of an earlier tourist film section and a few other official oddments, the National Film Board of Canada became within the brief space of two to three years one of the largest organisations of its kind and one of the most successful. Thanks largely to the foresight and experience of John Grierson, who assisted in drafting the Act of Establishment and became the first Film Commissioner, the Board has had important advantages. Although its composition was re-organised in 1950, the Board has hitherto enjoyed in its

operation considerable flexibility and a very necessary measure of initiative, since it is itself a policy-making body. In the evidence presented by the Board in 1949 to the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences it was further proposed that the Board should be given the status of a public corporation. The submission was that a corporation would provide a more satisfactory combination of public control with the freedom and flexibility which a creative agency requires. The proposal develops logically out of the Canadian context, but has suffered the fate of being conceived and delivered at a time when the forward-looking sentiments with which the world emerged from the war have begun to get sadly mislaid.

Finally, there is the kind of film organisation which has been developed in the countries of Eastern Europe since the war. In each case, following the practice of the Soviet Union, all film activities have been brought under State control. In the case of Poland and Czechoslovakia, for example, the method adopted has been to establish a State Film Company, with different departments for production (feature, documentary and news-reel), distribution, cinemas, equipment and so on, under the policy direction of the Ministry of Information. Under this kind of organisation documentary film production is only one of a number of activities undertaken by the State Film Company.

Although in these countries one finds the same kind of departmental instructional films being sponsored by individual Ministries, there are two important differences. In the first place, the State does not necessarily place as much stress on documentary production as in other countries, largely because it controls all types of production and looks to the feature entertainment film, as much as to the documentary and news-reel, to present official attitudes and policies. Secondly, one finds a particularly close alliance between documentary and news-reel production. In technique, as well as in organisation, news-reel methods tend, moreover, to take precedence.

In the case of the Soviet Union and, to a lesser extent, of other Eastern European countries, the pattern of documentary film development is, as a result, more difficult to follow. Outwardly, the reason lies in the State ownership and control of all forms of production and distribution, which makes it possible to decide from year to year which is the most suitable type of film to pro-



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EVACUATION OF DUNKIRK (British 1940)  
Pathé News: *photographed by* CHARLES MARTIN



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GANDHI'S FUNERAL (British 1948)  
British Paramount News: *photographed by* VED PARKASH



RAPE OF THE EARTH—THIS MODERN AGE SERIES  
(British 1948)

J. Arthur Rank Organisation



COAL CRISIS—THIS MODERN AGE SERIES (British 1947)

J. Arthur Rank Organisation: *directed by* JOHN MONCK

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duce with the certainty of being able to get distribution. To this extent it is an economic and organisational matter; but there is a more fundamental reason. In a society in which ultimate ends and the means of reaching them are fixed, in which political controversy has in fact no place, the relations between Government and people, and therefore the function of national information services, take on a very different form. With set objectives and agreed methods the questions to be answered are of a different order—how efficiently, how well and how quickly can the job be done?

No purpose is served by labouring this point but it does have wider implications. It raises the whole issue of utility film-making—how to reseed for better grass, how to prevent cross-infection in the ward, how almost ‘to bottle better fruit’—Priestley’s nightmare of the bureaucrat having inspiration.<sup>1</sup> From the film-maker’s point of view such subjects may appear unexciting to a degree, but there is another aspect. Very often it is precisely this kind of film which scores most heavily internationally. Similarly, it is no accident that of all the post-war film excursions into the international field one of the most successful has undoubtedly been the International Scientific Film Association. Once more one is brought back to the original documentary thesis about the universal appeal of specialist interests, from nuclear physics to philately or domestic science.

Those who complain of the increasing specialisation of official sponsorship are not in fact justified by the evidence of distribution. The shortcomings are of a rather different kind. Specialist films can be invaluable, but they should be related to the wider perspectives of their time. Whatever the forms of political organisation in a country, there are issues which are wider and deeper than mere technical efficiency and involve people’s attitudes to life as it has been accepted hitherto. Different economic circumstances or particular technological changes can affect the whole basis of life. The final loss of overseas investments during the war stripped Britain of her remaining protective fat and automatically posited a new approach to industrial activity: full employment being in this respect an economic, not a political, requirement. The development of air-travel forces a new conception of global relations. The introduction of the machine into Africa and Asia raises new questions of economic

<sup>1</sup> J. B. Priestley, *op. cit.*

and social organisation. The obliteration of an endemic disease like malaria can open new windows on to the life of a country. These are the kinds of issues affecting the total outlook of a people which should form a major point of reference for documentary film-making, particularly under official sponsorship. There is some evidence that the point has been taken since the war, though least of all in the Government sphere.

There is one further limitation to official film-making which Grierson first raised and which he has most consistently observed:

'Nothing can be expected from Governments beyond what I shall call the degree of general sanction. The degree of sanction by the party in power: it is the degree of sanction allowed by all the parties of Parliament or Congress. . . .

'This, of course, imposes a clear limit on the creative artist working within the public service for, obviously, the degree of general sanction does not allow of forthright discussions of such highly controversial problems as, say, America's record with the Negroes in the South, or England's record with the Indians in the East. The creative worker must not, however, simply denounce this limitation and dissociate himself from Government service. If he is a practical operator and a practical reformer, he will take the sanction for what it is and do his utmost within the limitations set, and this is one of the disciplines which the creative artist must learn in this period of society.

'If he wants to pursue the more difficult and controversial themes, I am afraid he must look elsewhere than to Governments, and here I think it will be well to examine in future years the sponsorship potential of authorities and associations who are less hamstrung than Governments necessarily are.' <sup>1</sup>

Given these general limitations, there are certain corollaries. If official film sponsorship is too closely tied to the whole Government machine, it can easily defeat its own ends. Films initiated solely by individual Ministries are often too narrowly specialist. The messages they are expected to carry may be too short-term, and given the average time it takes to produce even a ten-minute film, and the cost, it is clear that the film medium is not best suited to serving the day-to-day tactics of Government. On the contrary, it is by nature most valuable in the field

<sup>1</sup> *The Future of the Films*, an address by John Grierson to the Conference of the Arts, Sciences and Professions in the Post-War World, New York, 1945.

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of broad strategy. If recent experience proves anything, it is that Governments as a whole have tended to underestimate the wider, long-term aspects of documentary film-making. In most cases, this is clearly reflected in the official film organisations that exist and in the way they function. Failure to see the wider purposes which the film can serve has caused not only considerable frustration among film-makers but also a growing allergy on the part of the general public to films which are too unimaginative and too narrowly utilitarian. In fact, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Governments, who initially approached documentary sponsorships with a sense of shy daring, now treat it with complete matter-of-factness, using it indiscriminately and often for unsuitable purposes to the detriment of its public reputation.

### *Other Forms of Sponsorship*

The biggest single source of sponsorship, outside Government, is provided by industry. Since the end of the war and influenced by the successful use of films for education and training in the Services and in the factories, industry has turned to the film medium with growing interest. But the trend of industrial sponsorship, as in the case of Governments, has been towards the film's more specialised uses. Films to teach new skills and practices in the factory, to record new technical advances, and of course innumerable 'tours of the works' and outright advertising films—these have appeared in growing quantities, particularly in the U.S.A., Britain and France. The potential, too, is still far from being exhausted. The problem is to find amid a great deal of haphazard production a clear pattern of development.

The problems of industrial sponsorship are to be seen at their most obvious in the field of distribution. Governments are in a position to establish their own non-theatrical systems, even to secure official access to the cinemas; but few industries sponsor sufficient films to justify setting up their own libraries on an effective scale. The weakness is reflected equally in production. In persuading an industry to sponsor a film, it is a great temptation for a producer to hold out in the first instance the possibility of public cinema distribution, keeping non-theatrical distribution as a second line of defence. The film which results can all too easily fall between the two; too dull in its visual presentation

for the general public, and not technical enough for the specialist.

In this respect the film user, particularly professional organisations of doctors, teachers, agriculturalists and the like, have begun to provide a valuable lead to industrial sponsorship by indicating the kind of films which would be of value in their work. Documentary film-makers themselves have tried to develop their own methods of promoting and co-ordinating sponsorship. A pattern on the production side was set by the establishment of Film Centre, London, in 1937, as an independent body of producers and film consultants who were concerned to develop systematically other forms of sponsorship, apart from the Government. Through the agency of Film Centre organisations like the Shell Oil Company, the British Gas Council and others have developed to become major sponsors, earning an international reputation for their films. The example of Film Centre was followed in the U.S.A., where a similar organisation was set up in 1939, but for various reasons did not achieve an established position. Further attempts have been made since the war, but have also proved short-lived. In Denmark and in Australia similar schemes have been under consideration since the end of the war.

The actual form of organisation is not so important; what matters is the approach adopted and the premises on which it is based. Industry can hardly be regarded as a patron in the traditional sense of the word; its interests on the whole are too pointed and specific. Very few film-makers can persuade a hard-bitten organisation like the Standard Oil Company to put up £50,000 for a film like *Louisiana Story* and allow such complete freedom in its production. Even Flaherty found the task difficult. It is only the enlightened, forward-looking industry which enters the field of documentary film-making at all. But for effective sponsorship there must be some strong and clear identity between the industry's private interests and general matters of public concern. This identity must also be a continuing one. From the sponsor's point of view as much as the film-maker's, an occasional single film can never make the same public impact as a regular programme, planned year by year and designed to explore a particular range of subjects. This conception has taken firmest roots in Britain, and it has been largely responsible in recent years for the growing stream of films which have come

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from bodies like the Shell and Anglo-Iranian Oil Companies, the Gas Industry, Imperial Chemical Industries, British Overseas Airways Corporation, the National Coal Board, the British Transport Commission, Cadbury's and others.

Provided the industries concerned are large enough both to think and work in these broader terms, there is still a wide public purpose to be served by this form of sponsorship. In many countries it is still either untapped or, as in the case of the U.S.A., dissipated in a welter of unrelated enterprise. Obviously there are limitations. Industry has its own particular concerns, and on the whole shows both more interest and more imagination in matters of technical development than it does in the human relationships which this development so powerfully affects. In Britain films like I.C.I.'s *The Harvest Shall Come*, the Gas Council's *Land of Promise* and Cadbury's *When We Build Again*, emerge from the productions of recent years as rare examples. But the issue has been confused. There has been a great deal of unrealistic talk in recent years about the lack of documentary films of 'social significance'. Under a system of sponsorship—whether by Government or industry—there are clear limits to what one can be significant about and these limits inevitably alter with the times. The sponsoring by private industry of a film like *Housing Problems* belongs to a period that has passed—the period of the New Deal, the Left Book Club and the Popular Front.

The opportunities today lie in other directions. In the case of industry they may possibly be found in the big constructional projects which are being carried out throughout the world and mean a new promise of improved general standards of living. For industry each is a story of achievement, but to the peoples of Europe, Africa and Asia, and of the Americas as well, they can mean new hope. The reclaimed lands of the French Camargue, the steel mills of South Wales, the growing oil refineries of Europe, the hydro-electric projects of Brazil and the Upper Nile, the various colonial schemes to bring barren, marginal land into productive use, the anti-malarial campaign in Sardinia—these can be the new images of an age which, through the enormous extent of its needs, is deeply involved in joint economic enterprise, however much it may try to avoid the fact. In some cases the initiative is with Governments; in a majority of cases, however, the execution is in the hands of industry and already a

pattern of sponsorship is beginning to appear. The Technical Aid programme for undeveloped areas launched by the United Nations in 1950 can provide a further stimulus. Within the framework of such international enterprise there is scope and opportunity for industrial sponsorship on a growing scale.

Another type of industrial sponsorship has been developed largely out of war experience, though the need is in fact inherent in large-scale industrial organisation. Today internal works relations are as important as public relations. This applies as much to big private corporations as it does to nationalised industries. Regular film magazines for particular groups of industrial workers are, as a result, beginning to emerge. These are not concerned with training, but are intended for purposes of information. Some tend to be parochial and narrow in their interpretation and purpose—and there is a belief in some industries that this kind of film is something which can be made in odd moments by the works manager, who happens to have a private passion for cinematography. But in the case of a magazine like the British National Coal Board's *Mining Review* the result can be a vivid picture of the people and technical development of an industry with wide ramifications, and an important contribution to the growth of functional education which documentary film-making has most successfully developed. Incidentally, one of the earliest and most striking instances of films being used for this purpose is provided by Soviet practice in the early 'thirties, when whole film trains moved into construction camps, shooting and editing films on the spot, and projecting to the workers regular up-to-the-minute reports on work in progress.<sup>1</sup>

The other continuing contribution of industrial sponsorship is to the sciences, particularly the applied sciences, which its work directly or indirectly affects—mechanics and engineering, farming and medicine. This line of development is also closely related to the more specialised non-theatrical uses of the film.

Apart from Governments and industry, it is difficult to present a clear picture of other forms of sponsorship. A thousand and one organisations have at some time or another financed the occasional film, many of them of a highly specialised nature or designed to further some passing aim. Nevertheless, there are

<sup>1</sup> *Soviet Documentary*, Roman Karmen, in *Experiment in the Film*, edited by Roger Manvell (Grey Walls Press, 1949).

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interesting growing points. Municipalities provide one example; the trade union and co-operative movements another, but they are slow to develop along organised lines. In this field a great deal in fact depends on the foresight and initiative of individual film-makers. Unless they can intelligently intervene, a dull round of anniversary pictures will result, telling what this glorious city or that valiant union has achieved to date; or, in the latter case, crude political tirades of the type which have appeared in the States. Yet there is an interesting dimension which trade union or civic sponsorship can add to the documentary cinema. Wrapped in a great cocoon of organisation, Governments and big industry can easily overlook the local and the individual in their pre-occupation with the larger generalities of this life.

There is also widening scope for regional film developments. The Southern Educational Film Association service in the United States, started just after the war, draws its initial support from the universities and other public bodies of the Southern States. Having in this way an organic relationship with the community in which it operates, the Film Service has been able most successfully to develop production and distribution side by side, both geared directly to local needs and problems. There is the further example of the projected film service to cover the educational needs of the islands under the supervision of the U.N. South Pacific Commission.

Another important development is sponsorship by international agencies. Various attempts were made pre-war to interest organisations like the International Labour Office in the possibilities of film in their work, and conversely their own responsibilities for promoting the international exchange of films. Although little could be achieved in the discordant atmosphere of the late 'thirties, the war years provided a necessary practical stimulus. They demanded the fullest economic as well as military collaboration among what were to become the United Nations. Most of the Allied Governments in London formed their own film units and engaged in joint productions. There was also a growing exchange of films among the United Nations, many of whom contributed films dealing specifically with matters of international concern. The first United Nations agency to sponsor films directly was UNRRA. As soon as the war ended and the United Nations organisation established on a

firm basis, a central Films Division was set up in New York within the U.N. Department of Public Information. Under the directorship of Jean Benoit-Lévy, the Films Division embarked in 1946 on the sponsorship of a series of films. By 1950 up to twenty had been completed by units in a dozen or more different countries. The purpose of the programme was to contribute a number of internationally valid films, and at the same time stimulate individual countries to further production. Although the execution of the programme was made difficult by the cumbersome nature of the machinery involved, it has already yielded certain positive results. One characteristic has been a greater freedom of expression than is often possible under national sponsorship. All the films too have had something to say on subjects of immediate and general concern—increasing the world's food supply, the fight against illiteracy, juvenile delinquency, forestry conservation, epidemic control, etc.

This idea is related to a further project which John Grierson tried to promote when he went to Unesco in 1947 as Director of Mass-Communication. His aim was to encourage each country to produce films about those aspects of its national life in which something of lasting value had been achieved and from which other countries could learn, whether in education or science, industry or farming, medicine or social welfare. In this way a common fund of films could be established, each assured of international distribution because it had something to contribute to the general interest. Unfortunately, lacking the necessary authority and finance, Unesco has not so far succeeded in persuading national production centres to participate to any effective extent. The U.N. Film Division in New York began in 1949 an attack on somewhat similar lines. With its own production budget cut to the bone, it has endeavoured, on the strength of the films it has produced, to stimulate similar kinds of national production. The success it has had in distributing its own films—which from international circulation in the cinemas and non-theatrically have in a number of cases more than covered production costs—is advanced as an example of what can be achieved.

More important, perhaps, in the long run are the various Unesco Technical Assistance Missions, so far set up in Mexico, Egypt and Indonesia, with the intention of developing indigenous production in the less developed areas of the world.

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Another form of joint enterprise is represented by the Economic Co-operation Administration's film project. Under the direction, first of Lothar Wolff of *March of Time* and Louis de Rochemont Associates, and then of Stuart Schulberg, a considerable programme of production and distribution has been developed throughout Western Europe, drawing on Marshall Aid 'counterpart' funds and local production teams in the countries concerned. Quality and policy have varied widely. The programme has included a number of films of different kinds: by John Ferno on Greece and on the rehabilitation of Walcheren island, a pendant to his M.O.I. film of the war, *Broken Dykes*; a series of agricultural films in Turkey; British-Pathé's *Adventure in Sardinia*, on the anti-malarial campaign; a series on *The Changing Face of Europe* (on which Humphrey Jennings was working at the time of his death); rice-growing in the French Camargue. Although there has been considerable activity in and between countries, it is unlikely that this E.C.A. project will leave many positive remains, once production finance comes to an end. The exception is the possible influence it may have exerted on less venturesome Governments or industries to enter the broader informational fields of film-making or, alternatively, to contribute through inter-European agencies to the regular interchange of specialist agricultural and industrial films.

### *Relations with the Commercial Film Industry*

Documentary developments in the commercial field over the past ten years have followed mainly along two lines—the feature documentary and the magazine film, both of which had already begun to take shape in the late 'thirties. Incidentally, they represent two of the major trends inherent in documentary film-making at the outset.<sup>1</sup> The need to characterise individual people and localities leading to the use of fiction film techniques had already emerged in Britain with Watt's *The Saving of Bill Blewitt* (1937) and *North Sea* (1938), while the Rotha-Bond-Ruby Grierson film *Today We Live* (1937) combined a 'story' approach with journalistic treatment. In the U.S. Pare Lorentz with *The Fight for Life* (1940) and Joris Ivens in his more orthodox *Power and the Land* (1940) were also concerned with the human drama-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. pp. 194-198

tisation of documentary subjects. With the war the need became stronger and reached its most dramatic form, without any loss of documentary authenticity, in *Target for Tonight*, *Fires Were Started*, *Western Approaches* and *Journey Together*. Under the influence of these films—all Government sponsored—the British feature industry began to see a commercial merit in documentary techniques. With *The Foreman Went to France*, *Millions Like Us*, *In Which We Serve*, *The Way Ahead* and others it achieved an international reputation which had been lacking for many years. Several documentary directors, notably Harry Watt, themselves went into the feature studios. Hollywood was not directly affected to anything like the same extent. In the U.S.A. it was more a question of certain feature directors like John Huston, Anatole Litvak, William Wyler, John Ford and Frank Capra going over temporarily to the Government service, where their contribution—which included the *Why We Fight* series, *Fighting Lady*, *Memphis Belle*, *The Battle of San Pietro* and *Let There Be Light*—was certainly considerable, though temporary. The orthodox documentary directors in the U.S.A. contributed little to the feature documentary field, with the honourable exception of the two films of Lorentz and Ivens and Flaherty's own farming epic, *The Land* (1940-42).

As soon as the war ended, many of the occupied countries of Europe came into the field with their own essays in feature documentary style—the French *La Bataille du Rail*, the Danish *Your Freedom is at Stake* and of course Rossellini's *Open City*. The fashion seemed to be widely and successfully established. In fact, these films based on Resistance themes, although they appeared after the fighting was over, belonged in their inspiration to the war period. In this sense they did not necessarily point to a way forward. Nevertheless, urged on by the critics, many documentary directors believed that they had at last broken into the feature world with a type of production which had proved to be successful at the box-office and would therefore continue to be acceptable. The last four years have brought considerable disappointment to these hopes, particularly in Britain. The inherent excitement and drama of war had after all been a major factor. War provided ready-to-hand subjects which were hitting the headlines every day and had a proved public appeal. Everyone wanted to see *Desert Victory* and *Target for Tonight*. If it is possible to make peace as dramatically exciting, it is certainly

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vastly more difficult. Subjects have to be chosen with much more deliberation, and they must have a considerable intrinsic appeal to compensate for the lack of 'stars' and the accepted make-up of the conventional story film.

The future of the so-called feature documentary depends on a number of factors which have still been only partially faced. A clear interpretation of the term itself is one of them. In Britain it has been used with abandon. One might imagine that almost any documentary film classifies provided it is over three reels in length. Inclusion of films like Stemmle's *Berliner Ballade*, Rossellini's *The Miracle* and Jacques Tati's *Le Jour de Fête* in the Edinburgh International Festival of Documentary Films has added further to the confusion. The only consistent factors appear to be length and the use of natural locations instead of studio sets, and unknown or non-professional actors instead of 'stars'. The Soviet cinema, too, has made high claims for the feature documentary, also on the score of its war-time showing. But in this case—on the evidence of films like the *Battle of Stalingrad* and *The Fall of Berlin*—the emphasis is far more on studio reconstruction and well-known professional actors.

From the point of view of documentary organisation a clear distinction must, however, be made. These Soviet films, like the Czech *Stolen Frontier*, the Hungarian *Somewhere in Europe*, the Polish *Border Street*, the post-war Italian productions and certain American films, are clearly characterised by a greater sense of actuality in subject and treatment. The documentary example has had a powerful influence. Nevertheless they were all conceived and produced as feature films. It is an interesting comment that, next to the Italians, the most consistent record for story-documentary technique since the war has been held by Hollywood, that much decried citadel of escapism and studio artifice. With *Cry of the City*, *A Knock on Any Door*, *Boomerang!*, *Naked City*, *Panic in the Streets*, *Intruder in the Dust*, *The Men* and a dozen more, established studio directors have shown what can be achieved within the commercial film industry. In fact, one is led to conclude that the aesthetic, as much as the commercial success of the feature documentary is only to be achieved in the long run within the feature industry itself, and not despite it, particularly so long as production remains tied to distribution.

As far as documentary directors themselves are concerned, many of them may have yearnings for the wider scope of feature

production, and some have shown that they can successfully make the change. On the other hand, the feature film field has never been the principal objective of documentary, and to suggest that its exponents are all feature directors *manqués* would be to defeat their declared purposes and destroy the organisation which has given them economic security and creative opportunities which the commercial film industry, in a majority of countries, is still unable to provide with any consistency.

The editorial magazine film, by contrast, is easier of analysis; it too has had growing commercial support. The precedent was first set by *March of Time* in 1935. Although it has continued to draw its financial backing from the Luce publications *Time* and *Life*, *March of Time* has enjoyed wide commercial distribution throughout the U.S.A. and to a certain extent in other countries. Also it pioneered a type of screen journalism at which the Americans are particularly adept and, in its scope and techniques, considerably widened the documentary front. *World in Action*, produced by the Canadian National Film Board from 1940 to 1946, was equally successful in its distribution, although in this case the initiative and finance also came from outside the film industry. The Australian and New Zealand Government Film Departments began similarly to circulate monthly news-magazines to the cinemas during the war. Though these belong rather to the subsequent distribution section, they provide evidence of an acknowledged commercial demand. The first example of an editorial magazine series wholly supported by the industry itself was RKO-Pathe's (now Warner-Pathe's) *This is America*, started in 1942. Four years later it was followed in Britain by the Rank Organisation's *This Modern Age*, which ran successfully for four years but was then discontinued, and in 1950 by Associated-British-Pathe's *Wealth of the World* series.

The commercial merit of such films is that they form a regular series and are tailored to a set length to fit the exigencies of the cinema programme. In this respect the industry finds them much easier to distribute, and the public is gradually accustomed to their place in the programme. Accordingly, their cumulative effect is considerably greater than any odd assortment of single films. With television already competing with the ordinary news-reels in spot-news coverage, the theatrical magazine film, particularly where it concentrates on a long-term editorial approach, may progressively develop.

*Distribution and the Public*

The creative possibilities of film-making are without meaning unless there is access not only to the means of production but also to the means of distribution. In their early days documentary film-makers had to fight hard for entry to the ordinary cinemas. Their films suffered the fate of all short films. Insufficient space was available in the average cinema programme for their regular inclusion (particularly in the English-speaking countries with their two feature programmes) and virtually no money left out of box-office receipts to recoup even their bare costs. They were, in fact, treated by exhibitor and distributor alike as 'fill-ups'. As far as the trade is concerned, there has been little change of attitude in the last ten years. The only changes which have improved the theatrical opportunities for documentary have been achieved almost entirely by legislation.

Since the war a number of countries in Europe, where single feature programmes have always been more common, have required by law that one documentary or educational film shall be included in every programme. This is the case, among others, in Denmark, Italy and Czechoslovakia. In this way, documentary films are offered a minimum amount of screen time. In Britain an agreement was concluded during the war between the Government and the trade whereby one official short film was given free general distribution every month. The agreement has since been continued despite growing restiveness on the part of the exhibitors. During the war, too, the leading British and American distributors undertook to assist the commercial distribution of additional longer Government films in their respective countries, but this practice came to an end with the war. In Britain, the results commercially were extremely interesting. A number of the films distributed in this way, especially the longer feature documentaries, such as *Desert Victory* and *Western Approaches*, earned for the first time quite considerable sums of money; but no precedents were set.

Despite the opportunities open to British film-making as a whole since 1945 and the urgent economic as well as cultural need to utilise the nation's total film-making resources, very little encouragement indeed has been given to documentary and other short film-makers to produce for the cinemas. From the time the Cinematograph Films Act was up for review in 1946, and a

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'new deal' for short and feature-length documentaries might have been prepared, the Government has consistently shied away from the problem, despite the fact that, as the biggest sponsor of documentary films, it had a double interest in their fate.

In France, legislation works the other way round; by a law of October 1940, all programmes must include only one film of more than 1200 metres (i.e. only one long feature film) and rentals are based on a fixed percentage of receipts. This measure was designed to give some commercial opening for the short film, but it has had little real effect on the growth of genuine French documentary production.

In these various ways the amount of screen-time available for short films of all kinds has been slightly increased, but their earning power has not substantially improved. Very few commercial distributors and exhibitors have any real sympathy for the documentary film. They still see it as an implied interference with their conception of what is commercially entertaining for their patrons, and since these films are invariably sponsored they resent, too, the threat of external pressure, particularly from Governments. These barriers to theatrical distribution provide a further example of how economic and organisational matters condition the creative scope of documentary film-making. They, too, are tending to drive documentary production into other, and by implication, more specialised channels.

If Governments in particular, and through Governments the public, wish to see the cinema screen more freely open to a greater variety of opinions and ideas, then some steps of a more drastic kind appear an inevitable corollary. Indeed, if one considers—in terms of variety of entertainment and opinions—what is offered to the public by the radio, whether Government controlled or commercially sponsored, or by the publishing world, the commercial cinema by comparison throws on its screens a very pale and insubstantial shadow of the world outside. Only in the countries of Eastern Europe is the machinery of theatrical distribution in any way effectively geared to the potentialities of production and to the requirements of national policy. For the rest it is a question of pure opportunism, taking advantage of some passing chance or change in trade practice which will enable documentary film-making to find expression in some form or other on the commercial cinema screen.

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This continuing uncertainty about theatrical distribution is in the long run highly unsettling to sponsors and film-makers alike. Sponsors, particularly Governments under pressure from their Exchequers, are more inclined to reduce the scale of production, if they cannot get regular access to the cinemas. Film-makers, in turn, can easily be reduced to a state of schizophrenia—working with hopeful eyes set on the cinemas but secretly certain that their film will eventually 'go non-theatrical'. The result, too, can be highly unsatisfying to the public.

Whatever the difficulties, theatrical distribution nevertheless remains an essential objective of documentary film-making. The commercial cinema provides after all the means of reaching an increasing proportion of the world's citizens. The requirements of the cinema programme offer, too, disciplines and incentives necessary to the documentary film-maker who cannot afford to be cut off from the main stream of the film industry.

The development of what has come to be called non-theatrical distribution has to be seen against this background. It has quite different disciplines. It has never been merely an alternative to the cinemas, although this has been a constant and implied danger. In fact, the past ten years have seen a vast extension of the non-theatrical audience in nearly all countries. The original documentary contention that the surest way of reaching people and making them more responsive to the things which are really of common concern is through their professional and occupational interests, has proved to be of the utmost practical importance. It is in the non-theatrical field that one sees how much the audience for whom any film is planned constitutes an intimate part of the production process. A film for doctors or farmers, miners or engineers, must meet the audience on its own terms and answer some clear and recognised need. In this sense the public can in fact exercise a positive influence on the subjects and treatment of the films it sees in a way which is impossible through the impersonal machinery of the commercial cinema, where the only register is box-office receipts.

Since non-theatrical distribution is to this extent much more of a public service, it depends like documentary production itself on the stimulus and opportunities provided by sponsorship, particularly Government sponsorship. Initially at least Government initiative has proved to be necessary to establish a national framework of lending libraries and projection facilities. This

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work was begun in Britain before the war, and widely extended later by the Ministry of Information through the creation of the Central Film Library—today the biggest free film lending library of its kind—and of regional film offices. In the U.S.A. a large and effective distribution machine was built up by the Office of War Information, but it was an *ad hoc* organisation and passed with the war. But it is Canada which has developed the system to its fullest. Central organisation is necessary to give direction and to ensure a steady supply of films. Local organisation and initiative is, however, just as important. In Canada local activities are canalised through countless Film Councils which comprise all the principal community bodies of the neighbourhood: youth clubs, voluntary associations, schools, etc.

'Their purpose was to increase the availability of films, establish or assist in the setting up of local film libraries, to secure projection equipment for community use, to train volunteer projectionists and to provide guidance on the proper selection and use of films and other visual materials. Today there are more than 250 film councils in Canada, the largest with a membership of 200 organizations. Many have grown to embrace members from adjacent communities so that they now provide film services for an area, rather than a community. Throughout the four years of development, many have had to depend extensively on NFB for guidance and assistance. Regional offices and field staffs alike have assisted in organization, have loaned equipment where necessary, and have continuously helped in the training of people and the supply of films. Nearly every film library in Canada, including those of provincial government departments and universities, depends largely on NFB for a continuing supply of films on Canadian themes.' <sup>1</sup>

In this way the Film Councils provide the direct link between the film-makers of the National Film Board in Ottawa and the whole complex of local groups of every kind throughout the country. In addition, a variety of special circuits has been built up also on a functional basis, i.e. trade unions, farmers, etc. These circuits are provided by the National Film Board with regular programmes which include films specially produced to meet the particular needs of each. The only film about the

<sup>1</sup> *Brief to the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters & Sciences*. Submitted by The National Film Board of Canada, July 1949.

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important growth of Joint Production Committees in British industry during the war—Stanley Hawes's *Partners in Production*—was made by a Canadian unit for showing on Canadian trade union and industrial circuits.

In the U.S.A., too, the Film Council pattern is fairly widely developed, but it has none of the overall central direction. On the contrary, the local group is fed entirely by a mass of commercial libraries. Non-theatrical distribution in the United States is a highly competitive business, all distribution being conducted on a sale or hire basis. The chief merit of commercial exploitation is that it is beginning to make production for the non-theatrical audience a paying proposition. A great number of inferior quality films make the rounds, since it is far from easy for the film user to estimate the value of a film from its catalogue description; but the non-theatrical audience has critical sense:

'It will come as no surprise to the wiser producers of documentary film that the subject most frequently cited as "liked best" by the schools, surveyed by the textbook publishers, was Pare Lorentz's expensive and beautiful documentary *The River*. . . . Now today, ten years after it was made, it is adjudged by the schools themselves as the most useful film in their libraries.'<sup>1</sup>

This fact is an interesting comment not only on the opposition to Lorentz and the Administration for which he made *The River*, but also on the decision of the U.S. Government to suspend all domestic production activities at the end of the war.

The key to non-theatrical distribution lies, ultimately, in the extent to which the films shown can catch the interest and stir the imagination of local audiences and so influence community opinion and action. In so doing, it becomes in the fullest sense of the word a public service. Again the Canadian example is instructive.

'It is difficult to assess the results of film use in terms of community and national development. However, evidence of effectiveness is to be found in the hundreds of reports of community projects resulting from or assisted by the purposeful showing of films. Many of the projects have been of a local character, such as the planning of community centres, the redecoration of schools, and new ventures in children's art classes and musical festivals. Other

<sup>1</sup> Mary Losey, *A Report on the Outlook for the Profitable Production of Documentary Films for the Non-Theatrical Market*, for the Sugar Research Foundation, (1948.)

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projects have been related to province-wide programs sponsored by government departments of health, agriculture and education, such as efforts to control insect pests and weeds, the organization of farm clubs for boys and girls, the provision of hot lunches for rural school children, and campaigns to eliminate cancer, tuberculosis and other diseases. Still other projects have been of international significance, such as the national clothing collection, and the aid to children campaign in which the film *Hungry Minds* played a part. These films not only provided information and stirred imaginations, but also secured participation of the people in the communities, first in discussion and then in action.<sup>1</sup>

Non-theatrical distribution has, however, an importance beyond the national audience. The reasons which have enabled it to reach out through all the main professional and occupational groups in the community apply with equal validity on the international level. The war years witnessed the first beginnings of multilateral exchange between countries of films on health and welfare, farming and science. United Nations agencies have endeavoured to develop this exchange on a peacetime footing. In addition, a number of bilateral exchange agreements have been developed, particularly in Eastern Europe. A model, however, is provided by the agreement finally concluded in 1949 between Britain and Denmark, whereby each country undertook to make any official films freely available to the other. Finally, there is the work of private bodies representing film users, the most successful being the International Scientific Film Association established in 1947. Based on the initiative of the British Scientific Film Association and the French Institut de Cinématographie Scientifique, I.S.F.A. has come to include an increasing number of countries, and has achieved a position where it can with authority represent to the world's producers the interests of science in film. Similarly, the International Federation of Film Archives, through its exchange of film classics between national film libraries and private bodies, is becoming an increasingly important outlet for the best of old documentary films. It is not difficult to envisage this international liaison through specialist interests spreading to other fields of activity; the range potentially is vast.

<sup>1</sup> *Brief to the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters & Sciences*. Submitted by The National Film Board of Canada (July 1949).

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Whether one's concern is with general or specialised non-theatrical distribution, or with distribution in the cinemas, the same point holds good. The particular need of each audience is the essential consideration, since this need conditions both choice of subjects and their treatment. When this need, too, is related to the practical possibilities of the particular kind of distribution required to meet it, one of the main problems of documentary film production is solved. When the film-maker knows clearly and precisely his objectives and the limits within which he must work, he has real freedom to create. Without these guiding limits, documentary production can easily decline into a state of aesthetic anarchy or the dullness and muddle of frustration. Production and distribution are in effect one and the same process.

### *Retrospect*

Looking back over the economic and organisational developments which have taken place in documentary film-making since 1939, certain key factors stand out. Documentary is no longer a young movement. The first fine careless raptures are over. Governments have accepted the film medium as a necessary part of their informational services. Sponsorship in all its forms has greatly grown. So, too, has the number of production companies and technicians. In twenty years a movement has in fact become a business, with many of the inhibitions of the civil service added to it. But still documentary-makers have tried to remain a movement, and to a surprising extent they have succeeded. At the same time, the disciplines of sponsorship have become much more rigorous. Types of film and methods of approach and treatment are increasingly dictated by sponsorship and the needs which it aims to meet. Subjects are more exactly circumscribed, budgets more rigidly controlled. The growth of regular film-magazines means tighter and better production organisation to meet fixed delivery dates, as well as new techniques of presentation to meet the demands of screen *reportage*. Industrial development projects require regular film coverage. Far more planning and research are required of the film-maker, both in promoting the sponsorship of films and in their production. Finally, as sponsorship has become more and more organised and precise in its requirements, particularly

sponsorship by Governments, the danger of the film-maker losing all effective control of the medium has greatly increased with all the attendant risks of dull, unimaginative and even dishonest production.

In this section the recent development of documentary production and distribution has been considered only in its most general terms. The emphasis has been laid on organisation. The last ten years have been very much a story of organised growth. Because documentary has become more highly organised in an increasing number of countries, giving as a result greater economic opportunities, it has absorbed into its ranks a fair proportion of the *avant-garde* film-makers, who in the 'thirties constituted a substantial counter-force holding that the documentary approach to cinema was too polemical and doctrinaire in its educational purpose. Today, the 'film for film's sake' school has been outdated by events as a separatist movement. The major exception is the U.S.A. where the *avant-garde* has reappeared with new vigour but in the same guises, perhaps because the American documentary movement failed to consolidate its war-time growth and was unable to absorb the young or command their allegiance. Nevertheless, despite a certain dryness around some of the post-war wells of imagination, the aesthetic conflict remains to be fought out within the framework of a system of sponsorship which requires its own special interests to be served. In the process a challenge is still offered to the film-maker to find in the serving of a public purpose some vital and imaginative reference as well as the appropriate styles and images to excite the interest of his audience.

## (ii) NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

### (i) *Europe, Africa, Asia and Australasia*

by SINCLAIR ROAD

#### *Britain*

During the period of the 'sitting' war little came from British documentary except the back-log of the last year of peace. At first no effective attempt was made to integrate the available film-making resources with the Government's information machinery. The Ministry of Information's Film Division, headed by Sir Joseph Ball, was at first innocent of any plan or policy. The Treasury underwrote Korda to produce *The Lion has Wings*. The G.P.O. Film Unit lay stranded until on its own initiative it embarked on one or two productions: a co-operative film called *The First Days* and an air force film under Harry Watt's direction. The latter emerged as *Squadron 992*. Paul Rotha was completing his film for *The Times*—*The Fourth Estate*; Stanley Hawes's Imperial Airways picture was finished. The British Council handed out a few odd films, but the economic prospects were generally grim. Recognising the plight of British documentary, the Rockefeller Foundation stepped in with an interim project of its own—the preparation of a film report and draft scripts documenting the changes brought about by the war on social living in Britain. Administered by Film Centre and P.E.P. (Political and Economic Planning) it engaged the efforts of a dozen or so directors and literally kept documentary alive.

Finally in the summer of 1940, after a great deal of sword-crossing with unenlightened officialdom, British documentary went back into production. Film Centre was commissioned to prepare a policy brief for the full utilisation of the documentary film by the official information services, a brief that served its purpose for quite a considerable period. A number of documentary personalities joined the reorganised Films Division of

the Ministry of Information under the new direction of Jack Beddington. A central machine of Government film production and distribution was initiated and developed over the years into a substantial organisation.

Its path, however, was by no means without its thorns. There was plenty of bone-headedness in the Ministry of Information even after the reorganisation of Films Division. Despite the efforts of those who joined it, particularly the energies of Arthur Elton as production chief, the documentary film-makers were forced throughout the whole war to continue a running fight in the sidelines—on matters of information policy as much as on straight financial issues. *Documentary News Letter*, first started in January 1940, became the consistent barometer of these tensions. Nevertheless, in a few years three or four units and a handful of technicians were multiplied by four at least and their output came in astonishing profusion. The result at one level was a complete vindication of the thesis that documentary was essentially a propaganda weapon. One has only to look over the earlier issues of *Documentary News Letter* to see how strongly this point was taken. Creatively, too, the war years marked a culmination point. Unparalleled needs provided opportunities that were unequalled before or since. Quite apart from the steady stream of commissions that came from the Ministry of Information, there were many hundreds of instructional films of every type for use in the Services, as well as many millions of feet of operational material shot by cameramen attached to the Army and Royal Air Force.<sup>1</sup>

Three things at least emerged in the process. First, a far greater understanding was obtained of the use to which the film could be put for systematic instruction, particularly among large groups of people, where the aim was to achieve rapid familiarity with a subject hitherto new to the audience. In the case of the Navy especially, the various forms of visual instruction were the subject of concentrated experiment. Many of the results have had lasting value. This line of development in the interest of adult instruction began to bear fruit after the war, as attention shifted to the needs of illiterate peoples, not only in British Colonial territories but throughout large areas of the world. The present

<sup>1</sup> A very full account of the period 1939-45, together with earlier history of the British documentary film, is given in *The Factual Film*; an Arts Enquiry Report (Oxford University Press, 1947), to which the reader is referred.



THE FIRST DAYS (British 1939)

G.P.O. Film Unit: *directed by* HARRY WATT and other members  
of the unit



SQUADRON 992 (British 1940)

G.P.O. Film Unit: *directed by* HARRY WATT



**LONDON CAN TAKE IT (British 1940)**

Crown Film Unit: *directed by* HARRY WATT and HUMPHREY JENNINGS



**DESERT VICTORY (British 1943)**

Army Film Unit and R.A.F. Film Unit: *edited by*  
Capt. ROY BOULTING

fundamental education campaigns being conducted in Africa, South America, and in the Middle and Far East, owe a great deal in their appreciation of the part which visual instruction can play to the developments made during the war years and to the stimulus they gave.<sup>1</sup>

A second basic advance was achieved through the widespread use of the camera to provide a general and particular record of field operations. This advance, to which the British, Americans and Russians contributed simultaneously, had a dual effect. It enhanced the reputation of the film as a record of events beyond its purely scientific value in the laboratory. At the same time it materially influenced certain styles of film-making. Originally the Soviet film-makers were almost alone in appreciating the power of the film to transcribe contemporary happenings. *March of Time*, from 1935 onwards, contributed to its development in one particular field. But in the work of Capra in the States, Rotha and others in Britain, Grierson and Legg in Canada, the creative interpretation of events through existing film material was taken a long way forward.

Wartime film-making in Britain further provided a unique opportunity for assessing the much more uncertain quantity of how far the film can effectively influence attitudes and opinions. With the exception of the Soviet Union, where recorded information is limited, the use of the film in Britain was integrated to an extent not achieved elsewhere. In America, the volume was large enough, but there was no way—with Hollywood so firmly entrenched—of conducting official film-making as a single, unified operation. American achievement, and it was considerable, was much more an *ad hoc* affair.<sup>2</sup> In Britain, by contrast, production was closely geared to the distribution available in the cinemas, in the Armed Forces, in the factories and through all the other non-theatrical channels. In the cinemas the relative weight and purpose of different propaganda objectives was divided between one-minute 'flashes' attached to the end of the news-reels; five-minute and, later in the war, fifteen-minute shorts; larger documentary films and major story films. In each case the nature of the message to be put over determined the choice of the appropriate type and length. In the non-theatrical field similar distinctions had to be

<sup>1</sup> *The Film in Fundamental Education*, A. G. H. Hughes and Sinclair Road (Olen Press, 1950).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. pp. 308 et seq. and Appendix I.

made; regular film magazines appeared, like *Worker and War-Front* (1942-45), to provide a continuous link between the factories and the front-line.

Altogether the experience gained over five years was very wide, though actual research into effects was limited. The biggest omission was the failure, in the heat of the moment, to see that the audience records made by M.O.I. distribution officers in the field were passed back to the film-makers. There were instances of films being directly motivated from on-the-spot assessments of what audiences needed, but nothing as consistent as the two-way exchange between production and distribution which the National Film Board succeeded in building up in Canada.<sup>1</sup> In one sense the operation was notoriously British in that it proceeded very largely by rule-of-thumb methods, at times in the absence of any overall propaganda policy. From 1942 onwards the growing public demand for a greater measure of economic and social justice as a major domestic war aim began, with some difficulty admittedly, to find reflection in official pronouncements. In official film production it probably bulked largest: films devoted to health, social welfare, education and reconstruction generally, accounted for a larger percentage of total output than in any other of the Allied countries.

In this respect British documentary film-making had the prior advantage of being well-established. In any case there was never in Britain the whole-hearted exclusiveness given to the portrayal of actual combat as in the U.S.A., Germany and Russia. In Britain and the U.S. the great latitudes of war resulted in official documentary sponsorship on a scale hitherto unknown. The difference was that in the States it was the war which—by providing an enforced basis of financial security—also gave documentary film-making the coherence it had lacked. In Britain an organised movement already existed, and its pre-war purposes and practices were more readily continued into the war period without the loss of other perspectives. The keynote was struck in the opening editorial of *Documentary News Letter*: 'War, whatever its immediate aims, tends to produce dislocation—economic, social and moral. . . . It is necessary therefore to study the impact of war on the social scheme, and to do it ceaselessly throughout the period of conflict. Here the documentary idea in film has a great contribution to make. It can undertake this basic work—

<sup>1</sup> Cf. pp. 240, 336-338.

which, because it is more in danger of neglect—we mention first. It can also, often in the same act, contribute forcefully to *ad hoc* efforts in many branches of war activity. Technical training, both civil and military, public instruction in matters like rationing and agriculture, propaganda and civic education on the home-front, in the Empire and in neutral countries—all these are typical endeavours in which the documentary idea is of vital importance. Nothing could be better propaganda—both internal and external—than a wide analysis of the effect of war on our democratic state, and of the constructive actions which a nation can—if it will—initiate in the midst of a world which seems bent on self destruction.’<sup>1</sup>

Another interesting contrast between British and American film propaganda in the war period revolved around the question of incentives. U.S. official films made a strong appeal to self-interest, particularly those made for the troops. In Britain, where Albion’s own particular kind of isolationism was finally shattered by the threat of invasion and the fact of aerial bombardment, self-interest could be and was largely subordinated to the sense of community. The fact, too, that Britain became the host for more than half-a-dozen foreign Governments in exile and for many hundreds of thousands of their citizens made the significance of community in its widest sense more palpably real. ‘We’re all in it now’ was the feeling that the propagandist reflected. The U.S.S.R., the U.S.A. and US poster displayed on the plinth in Piccadilly Circus while Eros rested, was a further example, however short-lived the particular grouping. Similarly, the two-way link between the home-front and the battle areas was fully exploited.

Finally, the war years brought about a far closer collaboration between writers, musicians and film-makers, resulting in a greater agreement on matters of style and approach to the contemporary scene. Already in the ‘thirties writers like W. H. Auden and Graham Greene had worked on documentary films. Among musicians Benjamin Britten was for several years a member of the G.P.O. Film Unit, while Walter Leigh made his first start in film music under the same auspices and William Alwyn found his first opportunity at Strand Films with Rotha. During the war, Arthur Calder-Marshall, Montagu Slater, John Betje-

<sup>1</sup> War Aims for Documentary, *Documentary News Letter*, Number One, January 1940.

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man, Roger Burford and John Baines among others, joined the staff of the Ministry of Information Films Division, while many different writers were associated with individual productions. Muir Mathieson took on the full-time responsibility for all music at the Crown Film Unit where, with Ken Cameron as the assiduous sound supervisor, the reputation of British film music was considerably enhanced. Nearly every good contemporary composer was associated over the years with the films which the Government sponsored. Vaughan Williams wrote the score for *Coastal Command*, Sir Arnold Bax for *Malta G.C.*, Constant Lambert for *Merchant Seamen*, Alan Rawsthorne for *Burma Victory*, William Alwyn for *Desert Victory*, *Fires Were Started*, *World of Plenty* and *The True Glory*, Clifton Parker for *Western Approaches*.

In matters of style, as well as approach, the pre-war continuity was also clearly preserved. The specialities of the pre-war units, and of particular personalities associated with them, provided the growing points. The later traditions of the G.P.O. Film Unit, transformed into the Crown Film Unit in 1940, were in many ways the most spectacular in their development. Cavalcanti only remained as producer for the first year, before moving over to Ealing Studios to take charge of a new shorts section and there to stay in feature production. Though his direct contact with the Unit was removed, what he had already given in terms of aesthetic polish and technical fluency was strongly rooted.

The particular achievement of the Crown Film Unit lay in applying the documentary approach and techniques to a wider canvas and in taking the dramatisation of people far beyond what had already been done pre-war, in *The Saving of Bill Blewitt* (1937) or *North Sea* (1938), to a point which was comparable in stature with the products of the feature studios. In the process the Unit enjoyed a fuller range of facilities than had ever been available before to a documentary unit. Installed in 1941 at Pinewood Studios, it was favoured not only with personnel and equipment, but also with the pick of the subjects. By contrast, the small independent units still had to fend for themselves on severely limited technical resources.

The success of Crown in taking the opportunities that were offered is, however, undisputed. Documentary techniques achieved the widest public recognition through their application



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WESTERN APPROACHES (British 1944)

Crown Film Unit: *directed by* PAT JACKSON

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MERCHANT SEAMEN (British 1941)

Crown Film Unit: *directed by* J. B. HOLMES



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FIRES WERE STARTED (British 1943)  
Crown Film Unit: *directed by* HUMPHREY JENNINGS



COASTAL COMMAND (British 1942)  
Crown Film Unit: *directed by* J. B. HOLMES

to feature-length subjects. The achievement was substantial and lasting, though by now it has suffered somewhat from excessive praise and attention. The hopes it raised, the patterns it set were justified in their context, but viewed in post-war retrospect the real success of films like *Target for Tonight*, *Merchant Seamen* and *Fires Were Started* has been blurred. It was to the great credit of Harry Watt, Humphrey Jennings, Jack Holmes, Pat Jackson, Jack Lee and the others to have caught the living mood of the time and to have given it in four years lasting embodiment. They caught the warmth and the decency of enforced companionship, the often muddle-headed obstinacy which became determination, the individualism which was one of the best guarantees of independence, the humour and the tragedy, without which none of the organised machinery had any real meaning. Watt's *Squadron 992* (1940), simply an account of a balloon barrage unit in training and then going into action, set the pace. Unpretentiously effective in its depiction of a singularly undramatic branch of the services, it suffers a little in retrospect from being conceived before May 1940. Some of the scenes were too redolent of the attitudes of mind which characterised the 'phoney' war. Incidentally, the music score was the last which Walter Leigh was to write.<sup>1</sup> David Macdonald's *Men of the Lightship* (1940), which appeared just afterwards and was the last major film produced by Cavalcanti before he left for Ealing Studios, was a much more dramatic presentation. Macdonald, who had come from the feature studios and later went into the Army Film Unit to produce *Desert Victory* with Roy Boulting, reconstructed the story of a lightship attacked by a German plane, leaving the men to struggle to reach land until only a single survivor remained.

Watt's next picture, *Target for To-night* (1941), was the first film which really hit the headlines. The impact it achieved was way ahead of any comparable film of the time, due not to the overt dramatics of war in the air but to the people it described. Without fuss or pretence, and despite the inevitable organisational episodes, Harry Watt gave these airmen the chance of being themselves. To Watt went the credit of being the first to depict the human undercurrents of war on a scale which documentary had not previously attempted. Although he soon shifted into the feature studios proper, Watt retained in his subsequent

<sup>1</sup> Vide p. 168 (footnote).

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films this ability to direct people with an almost casual intimacy. The fact, too, that he has not been finicky about details, nor obsessed with finesse, enabled him to make the transition to the larger canvas of the feature film with much greater ease than most documentary directors. He has also been more consistently concerned with the handling of people and his success in this direction has depended to a large extent on his eye for natural types, whether among non-actors, amateurs or little-known professionals. *Nine Men* (1943), his first commercial feature picture, was a good example. Despite a somewhat hackneyed storyline—the heroic action of the lost patrol—the film came out surprisingly well without the assistance of any well-known 'star'. Strict observance of the three unities required by the budget, which was exceedingly small, meant that everything depended on the skill with which the characters were chosen and directed. The producership of Ealing Studios under Sir Michael Balcon has on the whole given Watt subjects worthy of his skill. *The Overlanders* (1946) especially remains a model of its kind; *Eureka Stockade* (1949) and *Where No Vultures Fly* (1951) were less successful.

The record of Humphrey Jennings provides a considerable contrast. Although he had been in and around the G.P.O. unit in various capacities since 1934, his known work as a director began effectively with the war. Together he and Watt made *London Can Take It* (1940), the first of the home-front war films to make its mark. Though only a one-reeler and made in very great haste, it meant at the time more in propaganda value to Britain overseas than many of its more obviously illustrious successors. Couched in the form of a despatch from the American correspondent, Quentin Reynolds, it told the story of one night in the first London blitz. What the camera reported with vivid terseness lit by the gun flashes, the commentary underscored with real pathos. Jennings, however, lacked Watt's more obvious robustness; his prime concern was with questions of mood and image and he went after both with intellectual earnestness. In another place or in another medium, he might have been passed by as an esoteric dilettante. At times, particularly at the beginning in *Spare Time* (1938), a study of people at leisure and his first major film, there was an undercurrent of contempt for things public and plebeian, but the war exercised a radical influence. His intellectual understanding of the things which made up the British

scene and his instinctive sense for the appropriate images, already revealed in *Spare Time*, became warmer and clearer with the war, perhaps because the issues were in some ways simpler and more direct.

Jennings's reputation grew with each picture. *Listen to Britain* (1941) remains in many ways one of the most successful examples of his particular talents. The kaleidoscopic transitions from Myra Hess playing in a National Gallery concert to the ragged strains of conversation and music in an army mess, or to the chuntering and clanking of a goods yard at night; here artistry and the association of telling details fully matched the purpose of the film. *Fires Were Started* (1943) was an achievement of a different kind. Any self-conscious display of skills was completely overshadowed by the power of the material, and the result was the most moving of all Jennings's pictures. The challenge of the subject—the National Fire Service—was too immediate and direct for calculated afterthoughts. It remains today one of the most successful and typical pictures of Britain at war. *The Silent Village* (1943), the reconstructed story of the Czech Lidice, *The True Story of Lili Marlene* (1944), *Diary for Timothy* (1945) and *Defeated People* (1946) continued in the same direction, but they did not equal in their treatment the story of London's firemen. *Diary for Timothy* (1945), his final picture of Britain at war, told of its last few months duration to the baby Timothy, born September 3rd, 1944. In technical skill and ability to handle the subject, the film was a fitting conclusion to Jennings's war record, but its message was muddled and uncertain and no equal for *The True Glory* which remains the real tail-piece and summary of the Anglo-Saxon war story.<sup>1</sup> With *Cumberland Story* (1947), Jennings moved uncertainly into the peace. The challenge of his subject—coal mining—was no longer direct and unequivocal. There was some nice observation of character but no clear conviction to the whole, not that the fault was by any means Jennings's alone. Soon afterwards he left Crown to join Wessex, a feature company under Ian Dalrymple (who had been producer at Crown) where he remained until his unhappy death in 1950. Behind him he left his last complete film, *Family Portrait* (1950). Made to proclaim the Festival of Britain, it was a most typical testament, both of his talents and his understanding of the British scene. To represent Britain and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. pp. 262, 347, 348.

her achievements, he drew a web of images and associations which gained their force from geographical or historical analogy, but in the end the overall impression was blurred. Somehow the specific purpose escaped one; what remained was after all a general impression of mood and atmosphere.

Another of the directors to establish the foundations of the Crown Film Unit's reputation was Jack Holmes, who had started as far back as 1931 with British Instructional Films. With *Merchant Seamen* (1941) Holmes joined Watt in tackling the problem of dramatising real people. His *Coastal Command* (1942) was in many ways a companion piece to *Target for To-night*, though coming later it attracted less attention. *Merchant Seamen*, however, stood on its own in its unpretentious handling of people. By comparison Pat Jackson's *Western Approaches* (1944), for all its other virtues, had a certain feeling of doctrinaire stiffness which was absent from Holmes's film. Where Jackson achieved his effect by the methodical building up of images, Holmes moved more casually across his scene. The character of the seamen and their attitudes were revealed in passing: how they lived, how they went about their jobs, the monotony broken by the sudden call of danger, the intimacy of personal contact and the quiet acceptance of it all. Together with *Target for To-night* and *Fires Were Started*, *Merchant Seamen* represented the high-point of this particular style, though it has not always been sufficiently recognised.

Apart from the time Holmes spent in India working with the Government film unit, his story is resumed after the war with two further longish productions: *The Centre* (1947) about the pioneer Health Centre at Peckham and *Berth 24* (1950) made for the Transport Commission's new film department. *The Centre* had the very faults which *Merchant Seamen* avoided. It was stiff and never really at home with these families in the clinics, the sports-rooms and lounges of the Peckham Centre. *Berth 24*, too, though brilliant in its direction of the dockers at work, was otherwise curiously backward-looking in its style and inspiration. Pretentious camera movements and periodic verse interpolations in the commentary gave an impression of artificiality. As with *Cumberland Story* one felt a certain lack which was perhaps not attributable in whole to the director. Possibly it is that the particular approach of *Merchant Seamen* or *Fires Were Started* is not repeatable in the same terms post-war. There is so much less

which the director can assume his audience will take for granted. Subjects themselves are no longer neutral; coalmines or the docks have become national issues with all manner of overtones.

The subsequent story of Pat Jackson is personally disappointing. In *Ferry Pilot* (1942) he had first shown the extent of his technical abilities. This account of the work of Air Transport Command revealed a remarkable sense of observation. *Western Approaches* was the development. Painstakingly reconstructed to achieve the last sense of reality, it remained an interesting pictorial analysis of the actions and reactions of one group of people. Lacking the obvious personal drama of a film like *San Demetrio, London* (1943) or the casual human intimacy of *Merchant Seamen*, it nevertheless achieved a sense of grandeur through the accumulative power of the images presented. Under contract to M-G-M for some years without much result, Pat Jackson's recent feature, *White Corridors*, was one of the best British pictures of 1951.

The influence of Crown and its leading directors operated in a variety of ways. The initial impact was most clearly marked on the feature studios, both in choice of subjects and in approach. The fact that certain feature directors were in one or other of the Service Units was also a material factor. Ealing Studios led the way, assisted by the advent of Harry Watt. The trend for greater realism grew rapidly: a number of feature directors contributed to its development, among them Carol Reed with *The Way Ahead* (1943), Anthony Asquith with *Freedom Radio* (1942), Charles Frend with *The Foreman Went to France* (1942), Launder and Gilliat with *Millions Like Us* (1943), and Thorold Dickinson with *Next of Kin* (1942). The swift rise in the prestige of British feature film-making during the war years was due in no small part to this realist tradition which documentary had first established. But again this is a fact which has received overmuch emphasis in recent years to the extent that it obscured balanced assessment of the opportunities open to documentary film-making once the war was over.

Among other things, it was assumed that the wartime distribution successes of such pictures meant a new opportunity for realist film-making or, more modestly, at least a market for three- and four-reel films of a documentary type. Two major factors were overlooked. Once the unified political and social mood of the war years began to disintegrate after 1945—and the process was rapid—with it went the warm, cohesive human style which it had

helped to make possible. There was no longer the same telling force in the claim: 'We're all in it together.' In the second place, the distributors had their own ideas of what a peace-time public wanted. Their assumption that escape from reality was what the public needed as relaxation from the strain of six hard years was, superficially at least, not altogether a wrong assessment. Different groups of film-makers had their own ideas of how to take advantage of what was thought to be the run of the market. Some merely added the extra few hundred feet to what would otherwise have been a two-reeler to achieve a statutory second-feature rating, often with little regard to the merits of their subject.

The most consistent attempt to achieve cinema distribution was made by the group which centred around Ralph Keene, latterly at the Greenpark Productions. During most of the war Keene had continued to be associated with the Strand Unit under Donald Taylor. Established in 1935, Strand was the first private documentary company. Its output of films for the Ministry of Information was prodigious, until its disappearance after various commercial vicissitudes towards the end of the war. It was at Strand that Keene began his *Pattern of Britain* series for the M.O.I., two-reel regional studies which deservedly earned a considerable non-theatrical reputation. Here John Eldridge also directed *New Towns for Old* (1942), one of the five-minute theatrical films on the replanning of British towns based on a script by Dylan Thomas, the poet. The same two worked on *Our Country* (1944), a five-reeler which aroused considerable though conflicting comment when it first appeared, but never achieved any effective distribution. Lyrical and sentimental in its look at war-time social Britain, it was attacked for being nebulous and artificial, despite the brilliance of its photography and at times well-matched verse commentary.

After the war Keene, Eldridge and others at the Greenpark Productions tried to aim increasingly at the theatrical market with three and four reel pictures. Though there was some attempt at characterisation in their films, they were in the main descriptive or impressionistic in style, relying on sheer photographic excellence to carry the extra length. *String of Beads* (1947), a story of young married life amid the lush beauties of the Assam tea-plantations and made for the International Tea Bureau, and *Cyprus is an Island* (1945), sponsored by the Ministry of Information and giving a more meaningful account of deforestation and

the wanton ways of vagabond goatherds, set the pace with all Keene's pictorial skill. Eldridge's *Three Dawns to Sydney* (1948) for B.O.A.C. had larger ambitions, but its weaknesses were the more apparent. Reminiscent of Shaw and Rotha's *The Future's in the Air* (1937), it told the story of a pre-Christmas journey by air from London to Australia, reflected in the ceaseless bustle of life below in the little town of Castel Mori in Sicily, in the deserts of the Middle East beyond Lydda, in Karachi and Singapore, in the aboriginal bush of the Northern Territories and in the great outback. Composed with loving care and rounded with considerable grace, the sequences had unity of pictorial quality but in overall intellectual grasp the film hovered perilously near the starvation line. The only connecting idea was the symbolism of Christmas with its overtones of peace, but against a background well over fifty per cent non-Christian that unity could only be spurious! *Waverley Steps* (1948), made for the Scottish Office, was an even more characteristic Eldridge production. Inspired to some extent by Sucksdorff's *People in the City*, it attempted to catch the mood of Edinburgh, its institutions and its people. There was no commentary. It was a film of moods and impressions; as such it was emotionally successful and visually exciting.

Part of the problem in making this kind of film lay in the limitations of the sponsorship system. There were clearly few sponsors prepared to spend £10-20,000 on ambitious prestige films of this type, while the range of subjects was also restricted. Solutions were not easy to find. A number of directors—Pat Jackson, Jack Lee, Ken Annakin, Ralph Keene—moved over into the feature studios only to find themselves faced with new difficulties—little or no control over choice of subjects and particularly the administrative unwieldiness of feature production after the relative flexibilities of a documentary unit. Above all, they lost the support and strength which derives from an organised movement.

After leaving the Naval Film Unit at the end of the war, Terry Bishop also joined Greenpark for a time, directing among other films *Five Towns* (1948) which attempted to bring a little domestic dramatisation into the work of the potteries. In 1949 he moved to the Crown Unit to make *Daybreak in Udi* (1949), a much more substantial film. Based on a script by Montagu Slater, with Max Anderson and John Taylor also associated

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with the production, this feature-length study of the progress of community education in West Africa achieved considerable success, collecting several international awards in passing. Though more purposeful in its approach, *Daybreak in Udi* was not wholly successful in its portrayal of character. The Africans themselves came across with conviction, but the principal character—the British district officer—remained stiff and a little uncertain: surprising in the circumstances since E. R. Chadwick who appeared in this role, apart from being one of the most outstanding Colonial administrators, is also in reality a warm and most sympathetic personality. Nevertheless, in this film Bishop used the development of character for a purpose. Unlike a number of films in the Greenpark tradition, he was concerned here with people, realising that they can provide the best vehicle for projecting something of the problems peculiar to a way of life. In this sense, the film was more in line with another and more socially-directed tradition which ran through the war years, and of which Max Anderson's *The Harvest Shall Come* (1942) produced by Basil Wright, provided one of the most outstanding prototypes. Sponsored by Imperial Chemical Industries, it was a study of British agriculture, viewed not in its technical and economic dimensions but in terms of the life of an agricultural labourer and his family. In this case, the principal roles were played by actors, with John Slater as the main character. The mixture of professionals with the Suffolk villagers themselves was expertly handled. The total picture, which avoided the flossy romantics of the countryside, marked at the time a considerable advance in the dramatisation of particular community problems.

Essentially in the same tradition there later appeared Budge Cooper's *Children of the City* (1944), produced by Paul Rotha for the Scottish Office, and Jack Lee's *Children on Trial* (1946) made by the Crown Film Unit at the time when Basil Wright was the producer-in-charge. Both these films dealt with the social conditions and causes of juvenile delinquency, though with significant differences in approach. *Children of the City* started as an unambitious picture, had a relatively small budget and was shot silent. It adopted an orthodox documentary technique to tell the story of three boys who for fun broke into a pawnbroker's shop and, more by accident than design, finished up emptying the till just as the police arrive. The derelict family of one, as well as

the narrow suburban home of another, the social welfare workers and the court officials were warmly observed in their own environment and achieved added conviction from any apparent gaucheness of behaviour. The boys came out particularly well. There was a charming incident in the pawnbroker's when the youngest, to whom the whole thing was anyway more of a charade than a crime, put on a large picture-hat from the unredeemed stock and strutted before a mirror. The solutions presented were themselves carefully qualified, and there was no glibness and no exaggerated sentiment.

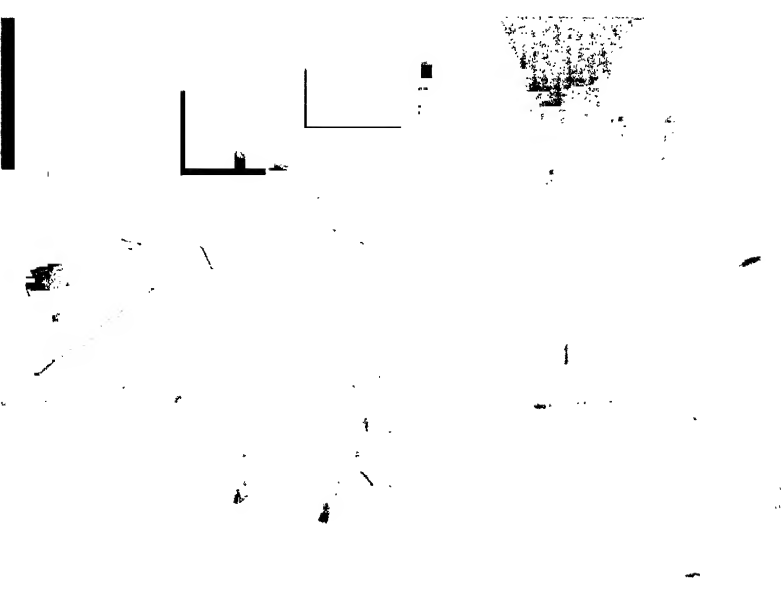
Jack Lee, on the other hand, was clearly more attracted to the fictional dimensions of his subject in *Children on Trial*, the drama of adolescents caught in the maze of pin-tables, bars and bright lights. The result was an infinitely more polished and expensive film, though in some ways less convincing than *Children of the City*, despite expert direction of the principal characters. Lee, who had earlier made at Crown *Close Quarters* (1943), a feature-length dramatisation of life in a submarine, later moved into the studios where he made the indifferent *The Woman in the Hall* (1948), *Once a Jolly Swagman* (1949), a rather disappointing story of the internal politics of the speedways, and the considerably more successful prisoner-of-war film, *The Wooden Horse* (1950), all under the producership of Dalrymple.

Both the delinquency films at least showed the potentialities of the semi-fictionalised social documentary, but the scope for their production within the resources of Government or industrial sponsorship is equally exiguous. To Jill Craigie went the credit for getting the film industry itself, in the form of the Rank Organisation through Two Cities, to back *The Way We Live* (1946) on the reconstruction of Plymouth. A far more expensive and larger production than a M.O.I. film, it enjoyed a considerable success despite initial opposition from the associated Rank cinemas. For continuity the film resorted to the well-worn device of the visitor, a journalist who took the audience the rounds of the city, its people and its plans. The journalist, being a sympathetic person, did not jar as he might; the family who were the principal protagonists were adequately directed, but the film as a whole broke no new ground. *Blue Scar* (1949), a later attempt in the same style, set out to dramatise Welsh mining and miners, but failed to master its subject.

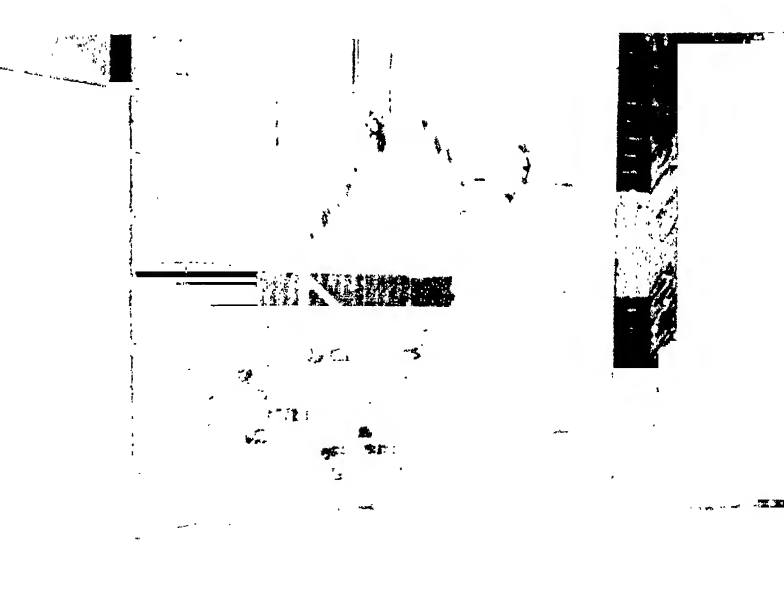
One of the few major Crown Film Unit projects which some-

how passed the exacting vigilance of the Treasury in recent years was a series of three second feature-length films. *Life in her Hands* (1950) on nursing and *Out of True* (1950) on mental hospitals were directed by Phil Leacock, and were essentially studio pictures. The main roles were played by known professionals and there was a striving for technical gloss which, despite good direction, tended to weaken authenticity. The third film (Grierson had first announced there would be six) was *Four Men in Prison* (1950) by Max Anderson, which disappeared under a ban of official disapproval. Most successful, however, was *The Undefeated* (1950), made by a young director, Paul Dickson, and produced by World Wide Pictures under James Carr. Sponsored by the Ministry of Pensions, it told of the rehabilitation of permanently disabled war-casualties as seen by one of the Ministry's welfare officers. A self-consciously restrained recital of services and facilities might well have been the result; but in the hands of Paul Dickson, the story of Joe Anderson, a glider pilot who lost both legs at Arnhem, became a most moving tribute to one man's courage and by implication to the care and attention he received. The main role was clearly difficult to cast; the man who played the part of Anderson was finally discovered after an exacting search. His performance in the film was outstanding; and it was a particularly effective idea at the end to twist the commentary—which, though warm and personal, was spoken by Leo Genn in the third person—into revealing that the commentator was Anderson, and Anderson himself the Welfare Officer. *David* (1951), made for the Festival of Britain's Welsh Committee, proved a striking successor. Here Dickson had more latitude to tell with real pathos and through the life-time of one man—a school caretaker—the story of Wales. Remarkable in both films was Dickson's ability to handle real emotion without fear or inhibition. He is now temporarily on loan to the National Film Board of Canada.

Wholly different from this fictional approach—with or without the inclusion of professional actors—there was another field which was opened up during the war years and yielded rich results, the compilation film in all its various forms. At one level there were the feature-length campaign films: *Desert Victory* (1943) by Roy Boulting, *Tunisian Victory* (1943), *Wavell's 30,000* (1942) by John Monck who, after the war, was also responsible for one of the best of *This Modern Age* issues—*Coal Crisis*. *Desert Victory*



CHILDREN OF THE CITY (British 1944)  
Paul Rotha Productions: *directed by* BUDGE COOPER



CHILDREN ON TRIAL (British 1946)  
Crown Film Unit: *directed by* JACK LEE



THREE DAWNS TO SYDNEY (British 1948)  
Greenpark Productions: *directed by* JOHN ELDRIDGE



WORLD OF PLENTY (British 1942-43)  
Paul Rotha Productions: *directed by* PAUL ROTH

justifiably was the major success; the material sent back to the cutting-rooms by scores of anonymous Service cameramen was extremely well handled, with a sober but effective commentary by J. L. Hodson and a fine music score by William Alwyn.

There were other approaches to the compilation film in many ways more important in their implications. In Britain, Paul Rotha's *World of Plenty* (1943) provided one of the first and still one of the best examples. The beginning of the war found Rotha as a director finished with his earlier industrial impressionism and strongly influenced by what he had seen and learnt during his stay in the United States in 1937-38. The change in style was already noticeable in *New Worlds for Old* (1938) made for the Gas Council, though *The Times* film, *The Fourth Estate*, completed just after the outbreak of the war, was more orthodox in its treatment. By the time *World of Plenty* appeared in 1943 the development was immense, for this film remains one of the outstanding productions of the war. It caught all that was best in the determination of its time to make something better of the post-war world. In its approach there were certain of the techniques of the American *Living Newspaper* transposed into film, but the whole subject of world food—scripted by Rotha and the writer Eric Knight and based to a large extent on existing film material—was compressed and composed with all Rotha's editorial skill. Each device had its function in bringing the theoretical implications of the main argument home to the audience in terms that meant something to people. Screen interviews with such experts as Lord Boyd Orr alternated with news-reel material of the current problems. Looking around, too, for a way of making figures—as well as facts—more concretely intelligible Rotha turned to Otto Neurath's Isotypes, which he had first used in an earlier Ministry of Information short, *A Few Ounces a Day* (1941) to convey the statistical value of salvage to Britain's war economy.

In *Land of Promise* (1945) the range of devices was further enlarged. There was a full multi-voiced commentary, personalised in different characters. A 'star' actor, John Mills, was brought in as the 'man-in-the-audience' to add further appeal—at the end stepping out of character and into picture in true *Living Newspaper* tradition. The voices of the experts were symbolic—History and Hansard; a publican held the ring as the

observer. Actual persons appeared to add the weight of their authority; while Isotype explained the relevant statistics. The result, however, was an aggressive insistence which almost defeated its purpose. *The World is Rich* (1947), scripted by Calder-Marshall, on the other hand, returned to the simpler style of *World of Plenty* and gained accordingly. Incidentally, it contained an unaccustomed piece of levity—a Fitzpatrick sequence guying the typical travelogue attitude that anything primitive is, of course, Homerically wonderful and idyllic.

Whatever the limitations of the more didactic screen argument, the historical importance of Rotha's particular experiments should not be underestimated. They were the counterpart in film of the A.B.C.A. discussion groups and the other popular education movements of the war. Of the British documentary school, Stuart Legg made the only other consistent attempt in this period to grapple with the problem of how to bring factual instruction into the arena of popular discussion in the cinema, though in style his *World in Action* series made in Canada followed much more closely the pattern which *March of Time* had already established.<sup>1</sup>

Rotha's other big film, *A City Speaks* (1946) commissioned by the Manchester Corporation, was more of a reversion to his pre-war style, and despite one or two brilliantly cut impressionistic sequences, particularly the one on Manchester at play, the result was not altogether a happy one. The film had been forced to carry too much material. Rotha's real and lasting achievement in these years was in his editorial films and in the training ground he provided in his units for a stream of younger technicians.

The further development of these editorial film experiments was not followed up for some time. There were certain similarities in *The True Glory* (1945), the joint Anglo-American production directed by Carol Reed and Garson Kanin, which used the multi-voiced commentary with considerable effect. It remains a most moving and dramatic film, though the irony of its plea for peace is today all the more bitter in its implications.<sup>2</sup> After the war, *This Modern Age*, though avowedly an essay in screen journalism, added little new in style. Despite a number of well-produced issues, it remained much more of an orthodox two-reeler with commentary. Most of the material was freshly shot,

<sup>1</sup> Vide pp. 332-334.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. pp. 347, 348.

## BRITISH DOCUMENTARY

often at very considerable cost, and therein lay a part answer to its sad demise. Despite its stylistic limitations it did, however, for four years represent on the British screen the only consistent and regular attempt to reflect something of the changing pattern of world affairs.

The most promising extension in the journalistic field since the war has been the work of Peter Bayliss: somewhat uncertain in the feature-length films *Scrapbook for 1922* (1947) and *The Peaceful Years* (1948), based entirely on material from the Pathé news-reel library, but growing in assurance in 1950 with the first two issues of a new sponsored theatrical series *Wealth of the World*, produced by the Pathé Documentary Unit in association with Film Centre. The technique is again compilation with multi-voiced commentary, depending particularly on the skills of Peter Bayliss as editor and the writer, Jack Howells. The voices are personalised in easily identifiable everyday characters. The approach is more emotional, and the danger is of becoming too easy-going. But at least the series attempts to present a consistent attitude towards its time—pitching its emphasis on the economic indivisibility of the world, and taking as its subjects first oil, then transport and recently the economic development of Colonial Africa.

The magazine film, whether freshly shot or compiled out of library material, was in fact another lasting development of war-time documentary film-making in Britain. The *Shell Cinemagazine* first started in 1938 and Andrew Buchanan's *Ideal Cinemagazine* which ran for a number of years pre-war were the precursors. From the factory series, *Worker & War-Front*, retitled after the war *Britain Can Make It* (both were made by Paul Rotha's unit and associated with Duncan Ross) through to *This is Britain*, for overseas distribution, and *Mining Review*, first produced by Donald Alexander at Data for the National Coal Board, the specialised magazine has come to assume a recognised place.

Donald Alexander, who directed several good two-reelers for the Ministry of Information during the war, was to make his main contribution later as producer at the Data Film Unit, which was among the first of the documentary groups to begin regearing production to the altered sponsorship opportunities of post-war. Of the films he directed in recent years, one of the most convincing was *Cotton Comeback* (1947). Though forced to

skate on the thinnest of ice in its attempt to attract workers back to a seriously undermanned industry without promising too much, it was nevertheless a warm and realistic study. The conflicting viewpoints of the industry's prospects were reflected in a family setting, but the particular home depicted was more convincing than some of the mawkish treatments which working-class families have received in similar documentary film situations. To the work of the Data Unit, Jack Chambers, who took over the producership in 1950, also contributed his skills. A most conscientious director, he had earlier made in association with Rotha *Power for the Highlands* (1943), important for the sensible things it had to say mid-war about the coming needs of peace, and, among other films, *Night Shift* (1942). At Data he directed *The Bridge* (1946), a four-reeler on the problems of reconstruction in Yugoslavia. Based on a script by Arthur Calder-Marshall, it was a moving account of the completion of a bridge vital to the life of one community. *Precise Measurements for Engineers* (1947) was a film of a wholly different sort. Its purpose was specialised, but as a piece of instruction it was as precise as the measurement it described. *Sardinian Project* (1949) was also a well observed record of the big anti-malarial campaign conducted throughout the island; though in this case conscientious attention to detail rather lost the more dramatic character of the operation.

Although the identity of particular film units is of less importance than the talent and the films they made possible, the history of certain units nevertheless constitutes an important part in British documentary development. The story of the G.P.O., now Crown, Film Unit has been told. In chronological precedence the next unit to be established was by the Shell Company in 1934. It too has retained throughout its seventeen years of existence precise and unmistakable characteristics. Its special position as a unit within an industry has given it more definite terms of reference and an enviable economic security. Consistently and progressively it has explored particular areas of applied chemistry and mechanical engineering. To a large extent, its work continues to reflect the personality of Arthur Elton who, from being responsible for its first development, returned as producer just after the war, Edgar Anstey having been in charge during the interim period.

From this unit has come a continuous stream of directors: some like Bill Mason, Denis Segaller and D'Arcy Cartwright

have remained, while others like Peter Bayliss, Grahame Tharp, Ralph Elton and Rod Baxter moved on to other units. The qualities which show consistently in the Shell Unit's films are those of lucidity and precision, allied to some most imaginative and effective animation diagram work from the persistent Francis Rodker. In the two main fields of endeavour Grahame Tharp's *Airscrew* (1940) and *The Principles of Flight* (1945-47) series, and the more recent group by Segaller on *Refinery Processes* (1946-50) are among the more outstanding examples. In the latter, the animation employed to represent the transformations which the oil-chemist is capable of inducing into molecular structure achieved an almost aesthetic quality. There are also the broader technological films. Geoffrey Bell's *Transfer of Power* (1940) described the development of the wheel and its key role in the application of all forms of power. It still remains a model of its kind. Bell's *Personnel Selection: Officers* (1946) made for the War Office to describe the methods of testing developed in officer selection during the war, applied the Shell skills most successfully to the field of psychology. More recently, Bill Mason's *Cornish Beam Engine* (1949) subjected this historical machine to fascinating analysis. In passing, his picture demonstrated the power of the film to provide a permanent and dramatic record of the remaining examples of another age before they pass finally into oblivion, where they otherwise remain for study only in print or engraving. Incidentally, it will be interesting to see whether the Film Department established by the new Transport Commission in 1949, under Edgar Anstey's producership, can exploit equally the economic advantages of being part of a large organisation to develop a style and tradition on a scale comparable with the Shell Film Unit.

Important, too, is the reputation maintained by Realist Film Unit under John Taylor during the war and, since 1947, under Brian Smith. It was the second commercial unit to be set up, in 1936. It was from Realist that Max Anderson directed *The Harvest Shall Come*; and Len Lye made his rarer excursions into actuality with *Kill or be Killed* (1942), held up as a model of instruction despite its gruesome subject-matter—unarmed combat. Alex Shaw (in between excursions to India), Frank Sainsbury, who made *Atlantic Trawler* (1944) and an equally warm study of reconstruction *The Plan & the People* (1945) and many other established directors were occasional visitors at the unit.

## DOCUMENTARY FILM SINCE 1939

During this time it was essentially an all-purpose unit maintaining a high quality of craftsmanship but with no specially marked characteristics. Since the war, however, it has evolved its own distinctive style—precise, clear, imaginative, often with a nicely judged dry humour, and warmer in the display of these virtues than the more analytical approach of the Shell Unit. The Child Health Series for the Ministry of Health, opened with *Your Children's Eyes* (1945), has been a consistent success. This first film directed by Alex Strasser contained a masterly analogy with an orange to demonstrate the structure of the human eye. To give some idea of the pattern of forces at work in a child's dreams, Jane Massey's *Your Children's Sleep* (1947) made an equally inventive comparison with an outside chessboard in which the pieces press against the single defender. With this series and the allied child studies made for the Ministry of Education, which included Margaret Thompson's delightful observation *Children Learning by Experience* (1947), Realist was also among the first to demonstrate the value of production in series. Not only does this provide a unit with a growing concentration of experience, but in distribution the effect is cumulatively that much greater. On the more specialised instructional level another series from Realist on the *Techniques of Anaesthesia* (1944-48), sponsored by I.C.I., gained an equal reputation.

To Richard Massingham at his unit Public Relationship Films goes the credit of being the one and only consistently successful humourist in British documentary. A doctor and amateur cinematographer with several entertaining short films to his name, and considerable talents as an actor, Massingham turned professional film-maker early in the war. In *Pool of Contentment* (1946) made for the Treasury to instruct Civil Servants on how to get the best out of their typing pool and in particular how *not* to dictate a letter, or *They Travel by Air* (1947), an instructional film for the British Overseas Airways Corporation staff which incidentally enjoyed a considerable theatrical distribution, Massingham successfully employed all the tricks of slapstick, combined with shrewd character observation and good timing, for wholly serious purposes. Similarly, though working in a wholly different medium, John Halas was among the first to show how the animated cartoon can be turned to documentary use. The *Charley* series which he and Joy Batchelor produced for the Central Office of Information in 1948-9 provided the best

example. *Charley's March of Time* (1948) on the growth of national insurance in Britain gave a most ingenious survey of man's quest for security from the amoeba to the present day. *Robinson Charley* (1948) subjected Britain's economic history of the past hundred years to the cartoonist's bench with equal success.

Thus considered in its total extent, documentary film-making in Britain over the past decade presents a very varied pattern. In the record there are skills in plenty and successes too; but in recent years it is the weaknesses which have received most of the limelight. War-time Government sponsorship provided vastly increased opportunities; at the same time it induced a certain flabbiness. 'The Government will provide' was the attitude of many film-makers. Accordingly, reorientation post-war was slow. An effort was made through the formation of the Federation of Documentary Film Units in 1945 to give some organisation and direction to the policies and activities of the major independent units. The failure to achieve a concerted approach to the job of developing a widened peace-time pattern of sponsorship was the main shortcoming.

Despite the appearance of new sponsors like the National Coal Board, the Iron and Steel Federation and the Transport Commission, the battle for economic survival became more and more acute. The Central Office of Information, in spite of Grierson's return as Controller of Films from 1948 to 1950, has been an organisation in decline. The equivocal nature of Governmental policies, at home and abroad, increasingly inhibited any imaginative information policy. A further effort in 1948 to rally the documentary movement on an individual basis through the formation of British Documentary, linked through the World Union of Documentary (founded in Brussels in 1947) with similar groupings in other countries, foundered on the same rocks of apathy and political division. But for all the discords and the uncertainties, the solidity of the last ten years' achievement remains.

The 1951 Festival of Britain, despite the minor role allotted to the film, still showed the measure of documentary's strength. The Telekinema proved the most popular single feature, thanks to Jack Ralph's programme which included the four stereoscopic films supervised by Raymond Spottiswoode, Paul Dickson's *David*, Wright's poetic evocation of London's port, *Waters of Time*, and *Forward a Century*, the one historical survey of techno-

logical and social advance, directed by J. B. Napier-Bell and produced by Stuart Legg.

Compared with the disjointed histories of individual and sporadic endeavour in a number of other countries, the weaknesses of British documentary begin to fall into perspective. The course of development was determined at the outset, when Grierson decreed that the consolidation of a movement mattered more than the development of individual skills and reputations. To a number of his early associates this meant early withdrawal from the job of direction. The names of Basil Wright, Arthur Elton, Edgar Anstey, John Taylor and others do not appear obviously on the roll but without their continuous activity as producers and administrators, the continuity would have been lost from the story.

### *France*

In France the force of the old *avant-garde* movement, which once produced such a wealth of talent and experiment, had spent itself by the early 'thirties. For a time a new pattern of documentary production looked as if it might arise with Luis Buñuel's *Terre Sans Pain* (1932), Vigo's *Zéro de Conduite* (1933) and *L'Atalante* (1934) and Benoit-Lévy's *La Maternelle* (1932). But in the events which were to lead up to war and occupation, something stifled any clear and consistent expression of the more positive realities of the French scene and inhibited the development of documentary film-making.

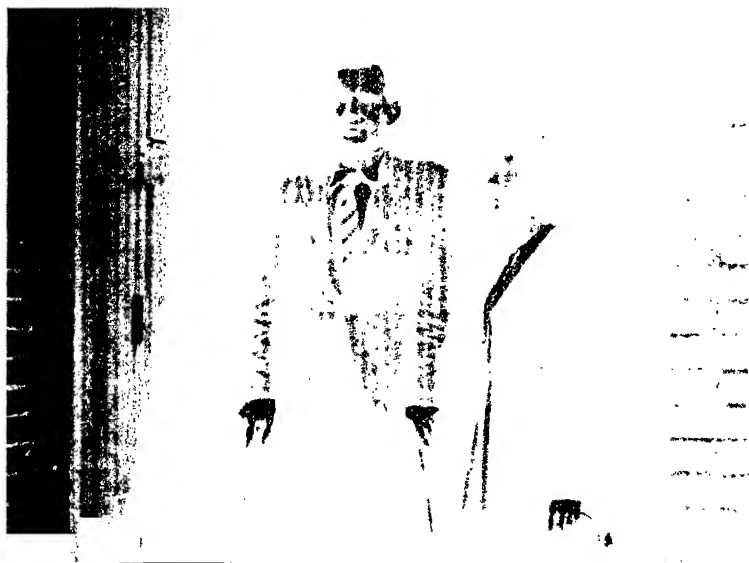
Liberation brought a promise of better things; a toughness and sense of purpose generated in the Resistance showed itself in a scurry of activity. Jean Painlevé, who graduated from the *avant-garde* into the most persistent pioneer of the scientific film in France, was appointed Film Commissioner in the new Government Film Department. It looked as if some overall production plan might be possible. But the hope soon died; there was no effective reorganisation. Painlevé resigned.

The Blum-Byrnes pact, which made French cinemas safe for Hollywood, dealt a further blow to French film-makers. Because there has never been the same sharp distinction as in Britain between the feature and documentary worlds, it affected all sections of the industry. A certain amount of official support continued through the Centre National du Cinéma, but there



WATERS OF TIME (British 1951)

International Realist: *directed by* BASIL WRIGHT and BILL LAUNDER



THE UNDEFEATED (British 1950)

World Wide Pictures: *directed by* PAUL DICKSON



FARREBIQUE (French 1945-6)

Ecran Français and Films Etienne Lallier: *directed by* GEORGES ROUQUIER



LA BATAILLE DU RAIL (French 1944-45)

Coopérative Générale du Cinéma Français: *directed by* RENÉ CLEMENT

has been no consistent programme of documentary sponsorship, with the possible exception of the steady output from the Ministry of Public Health of simple informational films on hygiene, child-care and tuberculosis. On the one hand, Government finance was provided for films like François Campaux's *Matisse* (1946), a study of the artist's life and work, while on the other the Ministry of Agriculture backed Dmitri Kirsanov, best remembered for his silent film *Menilmontant* (1924), to make *Mortes Moissons* (1948). A feature-length film of considerable interest in its documentary approach and imaginative sound track, it took on a strangely morbid air for an official film designed to keep farm-workers on the land. The general thesis was 'don't be dazzled by the city's bright lights, because they only shine on pimps, prostitutes and thieves'.

Since the Bill of Aid was introduced in 1948, considerably more public money has been put into film-making and with effect. Part of the money has been available for short films under the intelligent direction of Chausserie-Lapr  at the Centre National and Henri Claudel (son of the dramatist), at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Nevertheless, in the absence of a national programme, French documentary production has mostly continued on the same unsatisfactory basis. Planned Government sponsorship may induce rigidity, but the other method—taken to extremes in Italy—of subsidising short film-makers to produce films which distributors find commercially acceptable for the cinemas, has few merits.

In the years immediately following the war the aftermath of the Occupation and the Resistance was inevitably strong. Apart from the official film, *Le Journal de la R sistance* (1945), based entirely on news-reel material shot during the fighting by a group of film-makers led by Painlev , Jean Gr millon, Louis Daquin, Pierre Blanchar and others, the most successful was *Bataille du Rail* (1946). Directed by Ren  Clement, who before the war worked on occasional documentary films and in 1943 made a short film on the railways, *Ceux du Rail*, this film was also financed partly on a Government advance and partly by the railwaymen's Resistance group. Based on the latter's resistance to the Germans, it was a sincere and dramatic piece of documentary reconstruction. The scene where the hostages lined up to face the firing squad, a grim island in the midst of a bustling railway-yard, was given a sense of poignant triumph as every engine whistled in

defiant support of the doomed men. But in some ways the scope of the film was limited, giving little impression of the impact of war on the whole life of a people, on the railwaymen's homes and families. The emphasis was wholly on the more adventurous work of the Resistance; in marked contrast to the more rounded picture of life in the equivalent Italian productions.

The same is true of *Les Maudits* (1947), a more ambitious film about an escaping German U-boat. In both instances, however, Clement showed what could be achieved with non-professional actors. An interesting point about *Bataille du Rail* and its period was that it was made by the Coopérative Générale du Cinéma Français, a co-operative formed in the immediate post-war enthusiasm under Louis Daquin, secretary of the technicians' union. Made by the same unit, Grémillon's *Le 6 Juin à l'Aube* (1946) used the Normandy invasion to tell the story of that region with a certain oblique poetic brilliance. From the same unit came Mme Mercanton's *La Révolution de 1848* (1949) which used prints and engravings, including Daumier cartoons, to recreate with considerable effect the spirit of another age.

The more obvious aspects of reconstruction appeared as the theme of a number of films like Tony Leenhardt's *Réconstruction des Ponts Routiers* on bridge-building and Camus's *Réconstruction du Port du Havre*. André Gilet's *Génissiat* (1948), on the Rhone hydro-electric scheme, gave a straightforward factual account of progress over ten years or so but, with uneven coverage and little dramatic feeling in the assembly, it failed to convey the full sense of achievement. It is curious how often imagination runs dry when French film-makers tackle constructive social subjects. They are happier when they can be analytical and introspective. *Aubervilliers* (1946) by Eli Lotar and Jacques Prévert, for example, attracted considerable notice. It detailed the life of a Paris slum in all its sordidness, but was unsatisfactory in its lack of any kind of conclusion. Yannick Bellon's *Goémon*s (1947), though completely different in its setting—the drudge-like existence of a group of men harvesting seaweed on a little island off the west coast of France—was equally oppressive in its effect despite certain reminders of Vigo.

The work of Georges Rouquier, who abandoned printing for film-making early in the war, provided a welcome contrast. In *Le Tonnelier* (1945), a brief and pleasant study of the work of a village cooper, and *Le Charron*, of a wheelwright, the mood was

poetic and reflective. *Farrebique* (1947), his main work to date, was in the same tradition but far more substantial. Nominally a regional study of peasant life—the births, the marriages and deaths, the plantings and the harvests, that make up the existence of a family, the film moved with the slow regularity of the seasons. Beautifully shot, it employed time-lapse photography most effectively to give a telescoped impression of life as it passes. The ‘acting’ of the family was simple and convincing; the total effect very moving. After remaining without work for some time after making *Farrebique*, Rouquier collaborated with Painlevé on *L’Oeuvre Scientifique de Pasteur*. In 1950 he resumed the *Farrebique* tradition with *Le Sel de la Terre*, devoted this time to the lovely landscape of the Camargue. Beautifully shot and cut, with a very fine music score, it nevertheless failed to give a convincing explanation of the work of reclamation with which the film was ultimately concerned.

The work of Painlevé and scientific film-makers like Dr Comandon, Jean Dragesco and others represents another aspect of French film-making which has grown in importance. Its quality, too, is extremely high, at times attaining an almost lyrical character in its extreme precision. Painlevé himself added to his achievement in the field of popular science films like *L’Assassin de l’Eau Douce* (1947) on the struggle for existence among the minuter forms of pond-life with a jazz accompaniment, which was effective though a little grotesque at times; and *Le Vampire* (1945), a scientific account of the habits of the vampire, introduced with a typical Gallic twist by scenes from Murnau’s silent melodrama of the human vampire *Nosferatu* (*Dracula*, 1922). *Epaves*, made by a naval officer Jacques-Yves Cousteau and shot entirely underwater, was not just a scientific film but a finely staged puppet-show of fishes and rocks, seaweed and submerged ships.

Films on the arts also appeared in growing number, like Lucot’s *Rodin* (1942), Jean Lods’s *Maillol* (1944), produced by the training school I.D.H.E.C., and *Aubusson* (1946), Campaux’s *Matisse*, and above all Alain Résnais’s powerful *Guernica* (1950). Jean Epstein emerged from a period of long inactivity to make a disappointing film for the United Nations, *Les Feux de la Mer* (1948), about the solitary life of lighthouse keepers off the Bay of Biscay coast. By contrast, Nicole Védres’s feature-length *Paris 1900* (1946-7) was a remarkable compilation of Paris life in the

period up to 1914. Based on contemporary material, it provided a fascinating and witty comment on its time. More recently, the same director's *La Vie Commence Demain* was a commendably ambitious attempt to interpret the problems and prophecies of the atomic age, but technically its confused editing and amateur camera interviews with such personalities as Sartre, Gide, Picasso and Le Corbusier failed to give shape and force to its vitally important subject. Alain Gibaud demonstrated in *Transports Urbains* (1949) the rich vein of parody which documentary film-makers have long left untapped, while William Novik's *Images Médiévales* (1949) developed with striking effect the use of illuminated manuscripts to recapture the spirit of a past age.

Amidst many scores of French films of this kind and that, many highly inventive in their use of the film medium, the one thing lacking is a sense of consistency and purpose. The reason lies partly in the unsatisfactory economic basis of their production. With no substantial source of finance outside the film industry and limited prospects of distribution, the French documentary film-maker is left to make his weary round. Cavalcanti only found real scope for his talents in this field outside France, while others like Painlevé have retired into the more private retreat of some speciality. The history of the French cinema over the past ten years—feature as well as documentary—shows the talent and skill which the country still has at its disposal. The parallel story of waste and frustration, particularly once the immediate post-war social and political unity was broken, is equally revealing. It is symptomatic that many of the best films have taken this as their subject and inspiration.

### *Belgium*

As in the case of France, documentary production in Belgium has lacked any formal organisation. It has continued to revolve around a handful of individuals of whom Henri Storck remains the most outstanding. A leading figure in the European *avant-garde* movement before the war, he has retained his skill and his interest in experiment. In *Rubens* (1948), his most substantial film since the war and made with Paul Haesaerts, the art critic, Storck showed with considerable brilliance the power of the movie-camera to interpret an artist's work in a way which the

average art-film completely fails to develop. It was neither pretentious nor sentimental in its approach, but presented its subject in feature-length as a piece of vivid and critical exposition. *Le Monde de Paul Delvaux*, made two years earlier, was a shorter but equally fascinating study—the combined efforts of Storck as director, the painter Delvaux himself, the script-writer René Micha, the composer André Souris and Paul Eluard the poet. In this case, the approach was not didactic; instead the music and verse were used in counterpart to the pictures to bring out their style and mood.

Storck and André Cauvin (the director of films on Van Eyck and Memling) had pioneered this kind of film before the war. Films on the fine arts were in a way a continuation of the *avant-garde* and they have remained one of the main contributions of Belgian film-making. Vernailen's *Porcelaine de Bruxelles* (1947) was a study of technique. Charles Dekeukelaire, the other main figure in Belgian cinema, in *Le Fondateur* (1947), used largely contemporary illustrations with animation to describe the reign of Leopold the First. Implicit in the film, too, was an interesting comment on the economic history of the time. *Héritiers du Passé* (1948) made for the Belgian Army by Jean Cleinge, one of the younger directors, surveyed in two reels the whole development of Belgian culture. It surmounted this intrinsic difficulty with considerable skill.

Any expansion of documentary film-making in Belgium into other fields has been limited. Government sponsorship has been restricted almost exclusively to Army training and to school films. There is no overall information policy, nor has there been any notable sponsorship by private organisations. The more superficial aspects of Belgian life—its manners and customs, its buildings and countryside—have certainly found their way on to the screen, mainly through commercial enterprise. The Belgian Congo has also been a source of similar inspiration. But where the occasional opportunity has arisen, a sense of social purpose has emerged. Again Storck has provided the principal exceptions. Before the war he made *Borinage* (1933) with Joris Ivens, about conditions in the Belgian mining industry, and *Les Maisons de la Misère* (1938) on slums and rehousing, photographed by the Dutch cameraman, John Ferno, and Eli Lotar, who was later to make *Aubervilliers* in France. To these Storck added in 1949 *Les Carrefours de la Vie* on juvenile delinquency in Belgium—

sponsored by the United Nations. Latterly, this type of film received an added stimulus. Dekeukelaire produced *Maisons* (1948) on housing and *L'Espace d'une Vie* (1949) on the social development of Belgium in the period 1850-1950. Vernailen's *Ce qui devrait se faire* (1948) on the need for vocational guidance was made for the Ministry of Public Instruction. The Ministry of Colonies has also been more concerned with the production of films for educational use in the Congo—an important change of emphasis.

The development of Belgian documentary film-making also owes a debt to the film society movement. The Club de l'Ecran was largely responsible for the making of Storck's *Borinage* and has generally given generous support and encouragement over the years. Since the war the formation of the Institut National de Cinématographie Scientifique, with Luc Haesaerts as secretary, has added another dimension to Belgian film-making.

### *The Netherlands*

Documentary production in the Netherlands has in the past been limited in extent and organisation. Since the war there has been a little sponsorship by Government departments: a few information films, school films and army training films. The Government has also shown some initiative in trying to provide an economic basis for production generally and some kind of distribution outlet. Of the different production companies Multifilm, under the producership of Emil Verschueren, has produced a number of official films. *The Sea—My Native Land* (1948), a simple but effective study of seamen's welfare, was made by the same unit for the United Nations. Polygoon-Profilts has also a long record. Recently, however, a number of most promising pictures has appeared by younger directors: Umberto Bolzi's *Gas* (1950), van der Horst's *Wrested from the Sea* (1951) on the reclamation of the North East Polder and, in particular, Bert Haanstra's *Mirror of Holland* (1951). There is also the puppet work of Joop Geesink (e.g. *Kermesse Fantastique*).

The departure of Joris Ivens, John Ferno and Helen van Dongen pre-war was a loss to Dutch film-making which was hard to make good. Ivens has done no work in Holland since he left.<sup>1</sup> Helen van Dongen has remained in the United States, working latterly with Flaherty. Ferno, on the other hand, made a

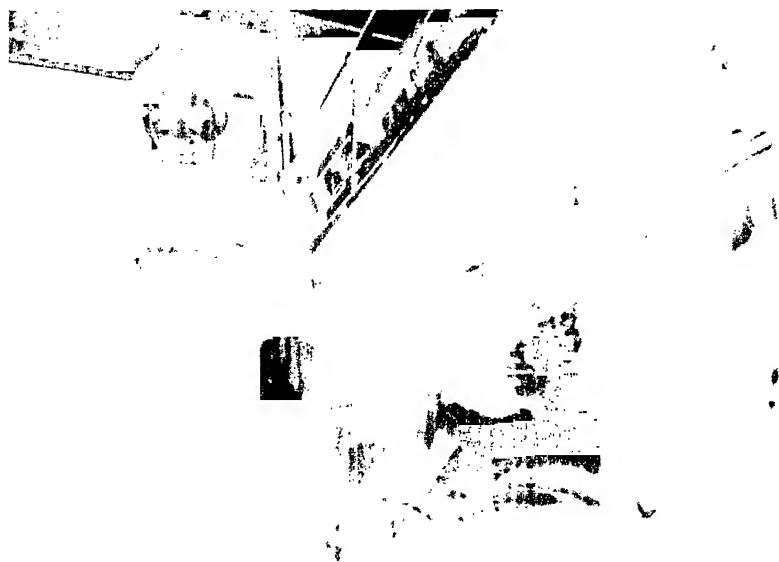
<sup>1</sup> For details of Ivens, Van Dongen and Ferno, see pp. 294, 318-330.



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CROSSROADS OF LIFE (Belgian 1948)

United Nations Film Board: *directed by* HENRI STORCK



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THE SEA—MY NATIVE LAND (Dutch 1948)

United Nations Film Board: *directed by* JOSEPHSON



DENMARK GROWS UP (Danish 1947)

Nordisk Films: *directed by* HASSELBALCH, MELSON and  
ASTRID HENNING-JENSEN



DE POKKERS UNGER (Danish 1947)

Nordisk Films: *directed by* BJÄRNE and ASTRID HENNING-JENSEN

## ITALIAN DOCUMENTARY

film for the Netherlands Information Bureau in New York during the war and later in Europe two joint M.O.I.-Dutch Government productions, *Broken Dykes* (1945) on the devastation of Walcheren after the bombing and *The Last Shot* (1945), a warm and moving document of what war had meant to the people of Holland. In 1950 he completed, under E.C.A. sponsorship, a sequel to the Walcheren film, showing the progress of reconstruction.

Production in the Netherlands for a long time remained without the leadership and inspiration which its best film-makers could have given. Nevertheless, the achievement of the last few years indicates a growing skill and a new vision which promises well for Dutch film-making, provided the horizons of official sponsorship can be enlarged.

## Italy

The story of the Italian cinema in recent years is completely dominated by the realist feature school. Although Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (1942) first pointed the way, it was with the production of Rossellini's *Roma, Città Aperta* (*Open City*) in 1945 that Italian film-making, which for so many years before had been pseudo-heroic and backward-looking in its inspiration, underwent a radical change. The tinsel glories of Italian fascism disappeared in a sudden awareness of the everyday joys and sorrows of ordinary people. Where Rossellini began, de Sica, Lattuada, Visconti, Vergano, Zampa, de Santis and others continued with growing sureness of touch. *Paisan* (1946), *Sciuscia* (*Shoeshine*) (1946), *Vivere in Pace* (*To Live in Peace*) (1946), *Il Sole Sorge Ancora* (*The Sun Always Rises*) (1946), *Terra Trema* (1948), *Anni Difficili* (*The Difficult Years*) (1948), *Ladri di Biciclette* (*Bicycle Thieves*) (1948), *Senza Pietà* (*Without Pity*) (1948), *Domenica d'Agosto* (*Sunday in August*) (1950): and *Miracolo a Milano* (1950): the list has grown year by year and has remained without parallel in post-war film-making. These films have succeeded where others have failed because for the most part they honestly interpreted the reality of their time. The post-war suffering of the peoples of Europe has no place as a mere backcloth for melodrama or adventure. Neither is patriotism or political conviction enough alone to illumine its full extent. This is the particular merit of films like *Paisan* and *Ladri di Biciclette*.

## DOCUMENTARY FILM SINCE 1939

The curious thing, however, is that the new orientation in Italian production has been confined almost exclusively to feature film-making. The short film section of the industry has not reflected in any noticeable degree the documentary values of the Italian scene. Short films generally have continued to find their themes in the past or on the surface of life. This is not due to any lack of incentive. There has been a spate of production, particularly since all cinemas were required by law to pass a fixed percentage of their takings to the documentary film which must, also by law, be included in the programme. The Government has in fact given short film-makers almost everything, except any sense of direction, for there is no official sponsorship of the kind found elsewhere in Europe. Documentary film-makers are left to make what they choose, and they have for the most part chosen what is commercially acceptable to the distributors. It is not that they lack skill. On the contrary, many of them show very considerable ability.

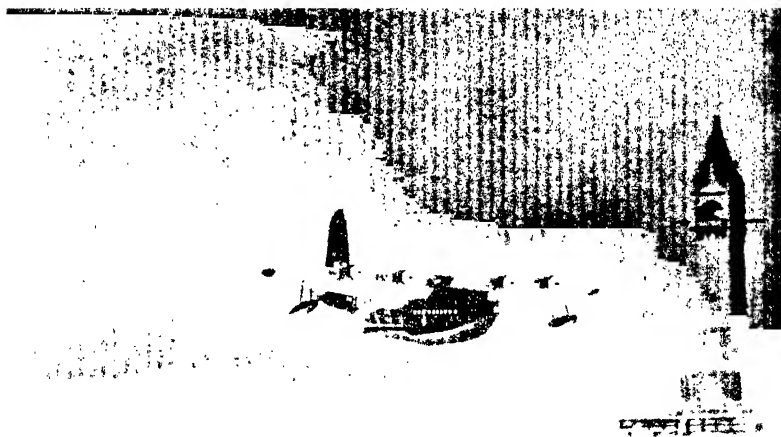
For a number of years before the war the Italian film industry had at least enjoyed a necessary measure of organisation. The Istituto Luce (established in 1925) offered particular encouragement to the making of educational and scientific films; from its ranks have come many of Italy's best directors. It was at Luce that Rossellini first started making scientific films like *Fantasie Sottomarine* about underwater life. The Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografica started by Luigi Chiarini in 1935 has continued to provide first-class training facilities for artists and technicians. De Santis, Zampa and Germi are among the products of the Centre, likewise many of the documentary directors like Pasinetti and Antonioni who, with Luciano Emmer, represent the best in Italian short film-making.

Pasinetti concentrated mainly on films about Venice—*Palazzo dei Dogi*, *Piazza San Marco*, *Venezia Minore*—all extremely well photographed, but strictly limited in subject-matter. The work of Antonioni, one of the younger directors, was best represented by *Nettezza Urbana* about street-cleaning, one of the very few naturalistic films. Luciano Emmer, on the one hand, working in collaboration with his wife and Enrico Gras, has made a distinct and valuable contribution to the use of the film to interpret the visual arts. His best work dates from the first version of *Dramma di Cristo* (1940). Based entirely on the Giotto frescoes in Padua, the film retold the story of Christ through the



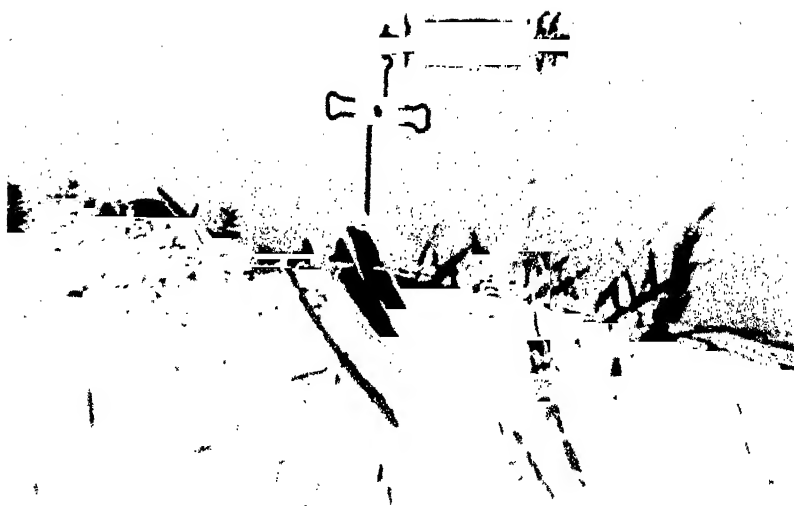
REFUGEES (German 1949)

British Control Commission: *directed by* PETER SHANKLAND



ROSINENBOMBER (German 1949)

British Control Commission: *directed by* GERT STEGEMAN



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ISOLE DELLA LAGUNA (Italian 1949)

Universalis: *directed by* LUCIANO EMMER and ENRICO GRAS



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PAISAN (Italian 1946)

Films-Internazionali: *directed by* ROBERTO ROSSELLINI

eye of the camera, with a Bach accompaniment and an occasional passage from the Bible to heighten the dramatic effect. What Giotto had been forced by his medium to depict spatially, Emmer recreated in time. The film was in no way didactic, being more in the tradition of Kurt Oertel's *Michelangelo* (1940). *Paradise Terrestre* (also made in two versions—1940 and 1948) employed a similar technique to illumine a set of frescoes by that strange and anachronistic surrealist Hieronymus Bosch. Less deeply moving than the Giotto film, it nevertheless showed considerable virtuosity. Emmer, however, has very much the approach of a still-photographer, relying for his effect on the movement of the camera-eye rather than of the picture. In his occasional naturalistic essays like *Isole della Laguna* (1949), a beautifully photographed account of lace- and glass-making on the islands beyond Venice, the figures tend to be serenely immobile. The influence of Emmer's work on Storck's *Rubens* and *Le Monde de Paul Delvaux*, on Resnais's *Van Gogh* and on other foreign film-makers has been considerable. More recently he has turned to feature production with *Domenica d'Agosto* (1950), an impressionistic study of a summer Sunday in Ostia. It was a most warm and promising human picture.

With these exceptions one inevitably returns to the bigger canvas of the feature directors. At first the reaction to their films abroad tended to be exuberantly uncritical. Here were feature-length films with contemporary themes made on location, with few or no 'star' actors—even the more doctrinaire hailed them as marking the new road which documentary film-makers should follow. What was somehow missed was a more precise analysis of their origin. Initially, at least, they were more closely related in theme and approach to the war period than was at first recognised. Also there were in Italian post-war society unresolved tensions which were more sharply apparent and more inherently dramatic than in other parts of Europe, just because they remained unsolved. Improvisation and economy in production were also imposed by circumstances. This is not to underestimate in any way the skill and imagination which Italian directors have displayed in taking the chances which were open to them and in making virtues out of the necessities of their time. The problem is very largely one of opportunity, and opportunity varies with the time and the place.

The case of Rossellini is the most characteristic, not because

he is in any sense the leader of a particular school, but rather because he was the first to catch the mood of the Italian scene when the war ended and to turn its very difficulties to account. His films are not polished, there is often a carelessness in construction and a looseness that derives from working not to the letter of a script but on the impulse of the moment. The result, however, is a sense of immediate contact which gives freshness and life. To say that this is a documentary method is not true. What such Italian films do have in common, however, is this feel of direct contact between the audience and the people and places on the screen, with no intruding barriers of artificiality. To that extent Italian achievement since the war should be related to the general story of documentary development, not in any false sense of aggrandisement but because these, too, are films with a sense both of purpose and of the real need of their time.<sup>1</sup>

### *Germany*

Nearly every country has had its travelogues and publicity films, the fascinating fact and the odd-job films. Their kind is universal wherever there is commercial film-making. But they constitute an enormous dead-weight against which the documentary film-maker has had continuously to struggle. They fill up the screens and use up the money. One of the more pretentious forms of this breed has been the German Kulturfilm. Before the war, and still during the war, films of this kind poured out from U.F.A. and the other German film companies and flooded Europe. They are still alive today. The International Kulturfilm Festival, started in Hamburg in 1949, attracted their like from a dozen countries. The Kulturfilm is a programme-filler, trivial in content and often mediocre in execution. It neither explains nor informs; it may be competently made but it is rarely exciting. It is concerned with the past or the sidelines of life; contemporary realities are its least concern. In fact, it is as different from *avant-garde* film-making as it is from the production of documentary, educational or scientific films.

Against this essentially sentimental outlook on life, there was another approach—equally artificial in its way—which was

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller account of the post-war Italian cinema, see *The Film Till Now* (Vision Press, 1949), pp. 595-600, and *The Italian Cinema*, Vernon Jarratt (Falcon Press, 1951).

## GERMAN DOCUMENTARY

developed in German film-making under the Nazis. It started effectively with Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1936) and *Olympiad* (1936-8) before the war. These early glorifications of Nazi mythology were highly successful in their way; they showed considerable editorial skill in their making. But they had one principal characteristic which was to be even more artfully employed during the war, especially in the campaign films—*Baptism of Fire* (1940) and *Victory in the West* (1941). While apparently dealing with subjects which were actual and with material that was real and genuine, this type of film in fact presented a picture of events which was at the key points wholly distorted. Siegfried Kracauer in his study of the early Nazi war films (incorporated later in his book *From Caligari to Hitler*)<sup>1</sup> has analysed in considerable detail the techniques which were employed to achieve purely propagandist ends. The stress laid on news-reel material is of particular interest. Germany, like most of the contending countries, had a large corps of combat cameramen engaged on all the battlefronts. The material they shot provided extensive coverage of all phases of the war. But it was used not merely for news-reel purposes but also as the basis of longer compilation films. Here the purpose was to achieve an unquestioning belief in Nazi power and glory by means of what was in fact completely authentic material, but selected in such a way as to emphasise only those points which supported particular attitudes which the producers wished to evoke. Films of this kind were an essential instrument of Nazi propaganda, both at home and abroad.

When the war ended, German film-making had collapsed with the rest of the Nazi State. Rehabilitation was slow, impeded by material shortages and inhibited inevitably by political considerations. When production restarted in the American, British and Russian zones, it could only proceed at first under licence or direct sponsorship by the occupying powers. Feature production struggled fitfully to life in all three zones—with at least a certain background realism in common, though on closer examination it became clear that the majority approach was to find solutions that avoided all questions of responsibility and consequences, as in the somewhat overpublicised *Berliner Ballade* as well as in films like *Film Ohne Titel, Liebe, 47*, or *Der Apfel ist Ab*.

To bring documentary production alive was an even harder

<sup>1</sup> Denis Dobson, 1948.

battle. There was in Germany no real comprehension of the purposes which documentary might serve, or understanding of its approach. The fact too that Germans were being warned of the dangers of State control and officially directed propaganda further complicated the issue of public sponsorship. In the British Zone, the Control Commission established a Film Department, latterly under G. Buckland-Smith, while Arthur Elton acted as film adviser. Some 50 films were sponsored in the years 1947-50, mainly through German units, although a series of three were directed by Graham Wallace working with the British Crown Film Unit. Many of these films showed considerable technical skill and latterly there was a growing understanding among a handful of the younger German directors and cameramen of documentary techniques and purposes. Gunther Schnabel's film, *3/4/7* (1948), dealing with one of the worst mining camps in the Ruhr, succeeded in conveying with moving directness something of the intractable human difficulties that had to be overcome in enlisting the co-operation of recruits to the pits. *Bergung der New York* (1949), shot by Erich Stoll, was a workmanlike piece of *reportage* of the salvaging of the German liner *New York* in Kiel harbour. Gert Stegeman's *Rosinenbomber* (1949) gave a brief but effective impression of the extent and work of the British contribution to the Berlin air-lift. In the same year a moving record was made of the vastness and misery of the refugee problem in the British Zone. *Fleuchtlinge (Refugees)* was directed by Peter Shankland, who was in charge of the British Control Commission documentary production, and brilliantly shot by a group of German cameramen including Rudolf Kipp, Erich Stoll and Herbert Koeroesi. It has been inexplicably held up for many months by the British Foreign Office.

In addition, a weekly news-reel, *Welt im Film*, and a monthly non-theatrical film magazine, *Unsere Zeit*, were made jointly with the Americans. In the American Zone, the direction of film affairs was in the hands of Erich Pommer, the veteran U.F.A. producer, who returned again to Germany as an American citizen. The establishment of documentary production in the zone was, however, mainly the achievement of Stuart Schulberg. Schulberg began work in 1947 on a record film of the Nuremberg trial which subsequently achieved wide distribution in Germany. Out of this production, a documentary film unit developed, based on Berlin and with Schulberg as producer. Some

## SWISS DOCUMENTARY

fifteen films were made during its two years of operation—on the food problem, on German trade, on the beginnings of Marshall Aid, but including several productions designed to spotlight the historical and psychological aberrations of Nazi Germany.

In the Russian Zone a new company D.E.F.A. has taken the place of U.F.A. It has a number of successful feature films to its credit; Wolfgang Staudte's *The Murderers Are Amongst Us* (1946) was in fact the first film to come out of post-war Germany. D.E.F.A. has also produced a substantial programme of short films, though they are more in the narrower instructional style of the better pre-war U.F.A. films.

Under the stimulus and direction of the occupying powers a pattern of documentary production has begun to take shape in Germany since the end of the war. The chief query is the extent to which it has really taken root. Now that the British and Americans at least have withdrawn from any further part in German production, it remains to be seen whether the handful of technicians who have begun in the past three or four years to realise the potentialities and purposes of documentary film-making can successfully withstand the deadening pressure of the native Kulturfilm.

### *Switzerland*

For years there has been an intelligent film public in Switzerland and, as in Germany, an active film society movement, but only a limited development of the more interpretative types of documentary film-making. The influence of the German Kulturfilm has always been strong, and it is in this field that Swiss film-makers have concentrated a major amount of their energies. Regional studies and general observations of nature have alternated with the occasional publicity and tourist film sponsored by the State Railways. A fair amount of industrial sponsorship has helped to swell production, but it has tended to be mainly descriptive of processes and products.

Of the production units Pro Film has made a considerable number of industrially-sponsored films. The work of Gloria Film has included a film for the Red Cross on the children of Holland and another on old age pensions. *Grat am Himmel* of Condor Film has been shown at several festivals. A more recently formed unit,

## DOCUMENTARY FILM SINCE 1939

Iris Film, is run by Dr Kaufmann, first known for his scientific and industrial films at pre-Nazi U.F.A. There is also a certain amount of educational and scientific film production.

The reputation of Swiss film-making abroad is based, however, mainly on the feature productions of Praesens Film who were responsible for *Marie Louise* (1943) and *The Last Chance* (1945), directed by Leopold Lindtberg. Strongly realistic in approach, these films employed documentary techniques in their production and have enjoyed a considerable success. More recently, with M-G-M finance, the same company made *The Search* (1948), written by Robert Schweizer, who also wrote the script of *The Last Chance*, and directed by the American Fred Zinnemann. Like the others, it dealt most movingly with the human aftermath of war. In 1951, Lindtberg directed another story-documentary, *Four in a Jeep*, which brilliantly handled a highly-topical situation in Vienna under Russian-American-French and British military police control. Its successful overcoming of the national language problem was notable.

### *Denmark*

The rise of documentary film-making in Denmark—which has renewed the country's reputation and enlarged the vision of its people—goes back to Poul Henningsen's *The Film of Denmark* (1935), a beautifully composed film of everyday life, sponsored by the Government. Its lyrical grace and occasional sly humour were characteristic of much subsequent film-making in Denmark. A few years later Theodor Christensen working with the first documentary unit, Minerva Film, made *Iran, the New Persia* (1939), on the Trans-Iranian railway. It was sponsored by Kampsax, the big firm of Danish engineers. Effective sponsorship did not, however, begin until just after the start of the war. To maintain the independence of Danish film-making and thereby keep the cinemas free of Nazi propaganda shorts, the Government developed an extensive programme. The Ministerierne Filmudvalg was formed to work with Dansk Kulturfilm, representing the main educational and cultural bodies, both drawing their finance from a tax on cinema receipts. What was at first a defensive measure soon yielded very positive results. Thanks largely to Mogens Skot-Hansen—a civil servant with a remarkable flair for film-making, who took charge of the

## DANISH DOCUMENTARY

Ministeriernes Filmudvalg's work—a lively school of documentary technicians was built up with considerable rapidity. Their productions during the war years were concerned chiefly with Danish institutions and industries—films like Bjarne Henning-Jensen's *Paper* (1942) and *Sugar* (1942) and Søren Melson's *Cutter H. 71* (1943)—as well as road safety, health, salvage and other campaign films similar in theme to those produced in Britain during the same period. The quality of the films was consistently high and at times most entertainingly to the point as in Hagen Hasselbalch's *The Corn is in Danger* (1944), warning the public with grave sobriety of the invasion of their country by the corn weevil. A good deal of wit and lightness of touch helped many a dull subject over the fence, though at other times excessive flights of imagination and sheer technical fancy have tended to obscure a film's message. But the general purpose remained a public one, and the conflict of opinion—which has consistently bubbled under the surface—has been on the real issues of style and approach.

When the war ended, the output of official films increased considerably in the general mood of expansiveness. In 1945 Arthur Elton was invited from Britain to produce a group of films on *Social Denmark*—describing more comprehensively a particular field of Danish achievement. Of the five films in the series *The Seventh Age* (1947), on old people's homes and directed by Torben Svendsen working to a script by Carl Dreyer, and Melson's *People's Holiday* (1947), were the most outstanding. At the same time Bjarne Henning-Jensen, one of the most accomplished directors, was moving more into the feature field where he made *Ditte, Child of Man* (1947), a sombre but moving piece of realism based on the novel of Anderson Nexø, and *Those Blasted Kids* (1947), a delightful story of children in the slums of Copenhagen, reminiscent of Erich Kästner but warmer and simpler in its treatment. Astrid Henning-Jensen, apart from collaborating with her husband, has also directed a charming children's film *Palle Alone in the World* (1949).

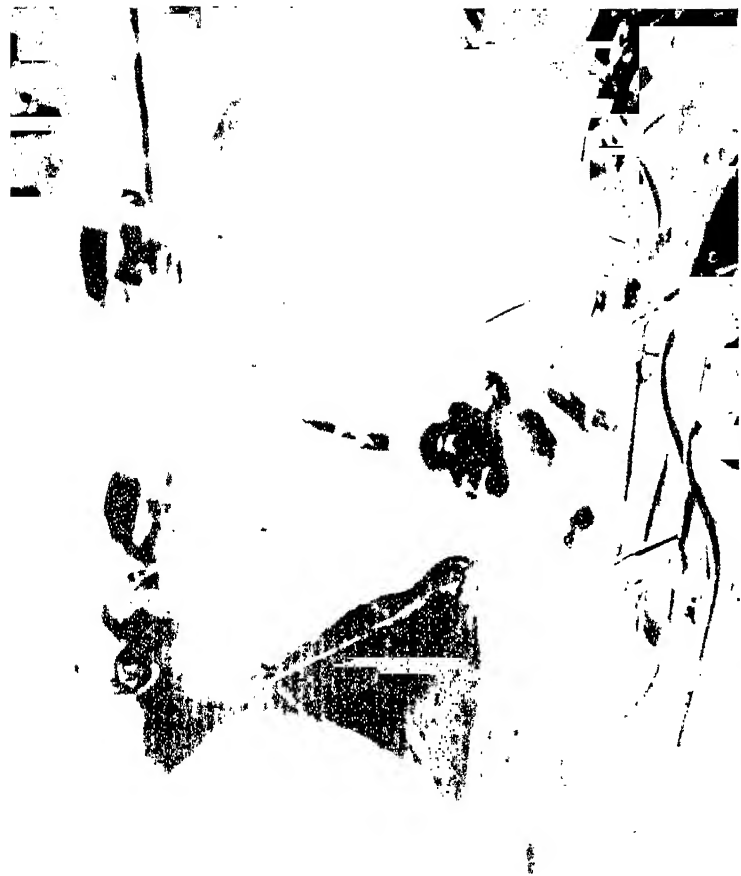
Danish documentary began to be more conscious of itself and its international relations. Skot-Hansen left to work for Unesco and later U.N. Christensen went to Sweden to make one of the U.N. films, *Green Gold* (1949), on the world's timber resources. Ingolf Boisen made for U.N. distribution, *They Guide You Across* (1949) on the international co-operation needed to keep the

world's airways open. In 1947 Dansk Filmforbund was established as a forum of opinion and an organisation to represent the interests and aims of Danish film-makers, also publishing a lively periodical. The development of distribution went ahead at the same time. The Government *Statens Filmcentral* under Ebbe Neergaard has become a major source of films. It handles both the theatrical and non-theatrical distribution of all official documentaries and acquires for its lending library foreign features and documentaries. Incidentally, by law every cinema must include one Danish documentary.

Production meanwhile continued to follow the general pattern of official requirements but with considerable variety of treatment. In *Tale of a City* (1948) Ove Sevel showed with fanciful effect how a rheumatism campaign can be brought home to an audience. In *Speech of the Figures* (1948), he enlivened far more unpromising material—a review of the Budget—with skilful use of animation. Melson, too, experimented in abstract animation with particular success in Hasselbalch's tuberculosis film. In *Meeting of the Ways* (1948) Hasselbalch with a kind of jazzed editing put a great deal of racy vigour into the work of Kastrup Airport.

Theodor Christensen, always an intelligent and sensitive director, continued on more traditional lines, though his canvas is usually bigger. *We are the Railways* (1948) was a well observed film about the life and work of a big railway junction. Apart from *Your Freedom is at Stake* (1945), an uneven compilation film on Denmark under the Germans with a considerable amount of footage shot by Resistance cameramen, one of the most effective examples of Christensen's work was *7 Million Horse Power* (1943). This film was made during the war for Burmeister and Wain, the shipbuilders, but was not given the showing it deserved. An impressive study of an industry, it showed equal feeling for the brute power of machines and the skill and sweat of the men who make them.

There is a limited amount of industrial sponsorship of this kind. But the main source of production finance remains the Government, and it has worked consistently to the advantage of Danish film-making. It has given an opportunity and a purpose which would not have been available from any other source. The country's *avant-garde* school has mounted repeated attacks on the whole conception of official sponsorship, but it has pro-



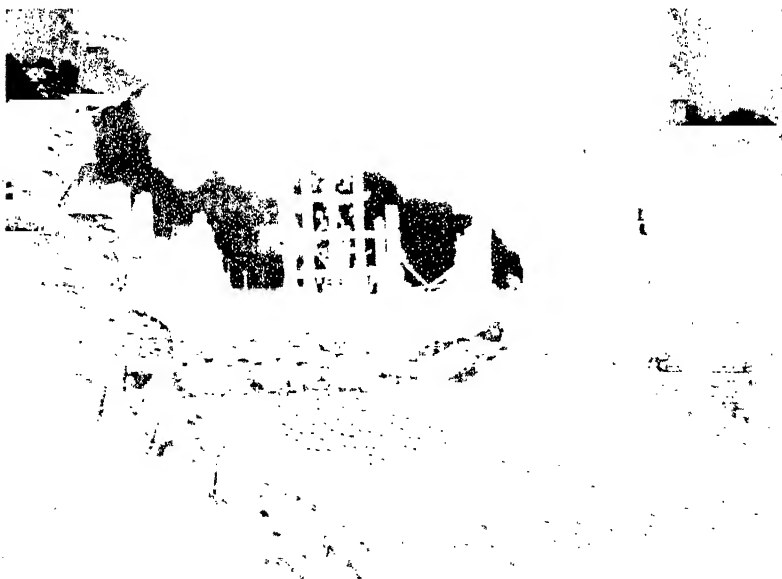
BICYCLE THIEVES (Italian 1948)  
P.D.S.: *directed by VITTORIO DE SICA*



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STALINGRAD (Soviet 1943)

Central Newsreel Studios: *edited by* LEONID VARLAMOV



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THE BATTLE OF STALINGRAD: PART II (Soviet 1948)

Moscow Studio: *directed by* V. PETROV

## SCANDINAVIAN DOCUMENTARY

vided no alternative. Against it stands the solid work of Skot-Hansen, Christensen, Melson, Hasselbalch, Sevel, Boisen, Svendsen, the Henning-Jensens and a dozen others.

Certainly Government sponsorship has its limitations. From 1949 Dansk Kulturfilm, working jointly with Ministeriernes Filmudvalg, has been going through a period of crisis. There has been a lack of balance in its programmes; a massive and costly piece of historical reconstruction to celebrate the centenary of the Danish Constitution proved an unwise experiment. There has even been unemployment among technicians. But the symptoms of strain are not peculiar to Denmark; they are to be found equally in Britain, the United States and elsewhere.

### *Norway and Sweden*

By contrast, Norway has so far little to show, but the example of Danish and British documentary film-making has had its impact. In 1948 an official film unit was established and the work of training and assembling technicians and building up technical resources (laboratories are still a problem) has been going ahead. Only a few films have been produced, but the enthusiasm and the interest is there. The feature-length *The Battle of Heavy Water*, by Jean Dréville and directed by T. V. Müller, was the result of joint French and Norwegian enterprise; it reconstructed the sabotage of the Norwegian heavy water factory. One considerable advantage is the fact that the majority of Norwegian cinemas are municipally owned and the problem of securing distribution is thus infinitely simpler than in other countries.

Sweden, on the other hand, has mainly been a domain of the Kulturfilm. Official sponsorship has been only occasional, and there has been no central Government organisation of any kind. For the most part production has been financed by the film industry itself and has had to pay its way through commercial distribution. The choice of subjects has been conditioned accordingly. Svensk Filmindustri, the principal production company, has been producing shorts and school-films in addition to feature films for many years. The most outstanding figure in this field is Arne Sucksdorff.

Sucksdorff, still a young man, made his first film of account, *A Summer Tale*, in 1941, with his own money. It was shown to Svensk Filmindustri who took over the film and its director.

## DOCUMENTARY FILM SINCE 1939

Since then Sucksdorff has turned out roughly a film a year and acquired a considerable reputation in Europe. *People in the City* (1947) was the first to gain him wide recognition. It was a film of impressions about life in Stockholm: without commentary it relied for its success on the leisured pace with which the camera moved and observed. It was beautifully photographed. Sucksdorff is a craftsman working with skill and patience. He is most at home in the countryside where much of his time is spent. He works without a full shooting script and shoots a great deal of footage, but the observations of nature which result from a return to the cutting-room, like *The West Wind*, *Shadows on the Snow*, *Divided World* (1948) are minutely precise in mood and detail. They are restrained, but not always lyrically serene. As in *Divided World* he is capable of reproducing the violence of wild life with equal effect. That is the extent of his achievement. His films are not didactic, nor particularly of the present; their purpose is a more individual one. They have added to the reputation of Swedish film-making, but their contribution to the growth of the documentary medium can be measured chiefly in technical terms. With the possible exception of Gosta Werner who made *The Sacrifice* (1946) and *The Train* (1947), the latter with an interesting sound track, Sucksdorff's is the only Swedish achievement in this field.

### *Soviet Union*

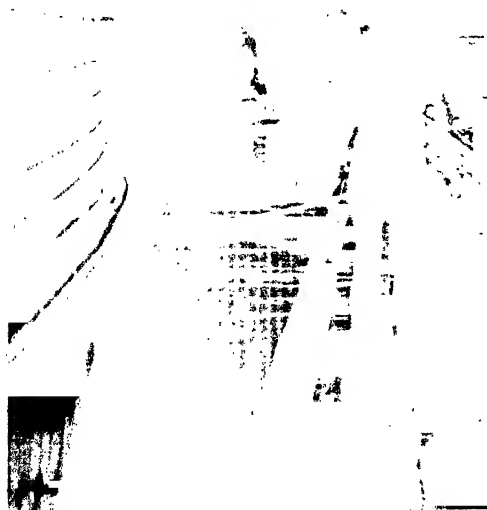
After brilliant beginnings, when its international prestige and influence were unparalleled, the achievement of the Soviet cinema in the 'thirties did not remain at the same level. In particular, it was challenged on its failure to represent contemporary Soviet life and endeavour in anything like the extent or depth in which it had depicted the period of revolution. Despite the complete reorganisation of all literary and artistic activity along the path of 'social realism' in 1932, film studios—though more personalised in their stories—kept largely to historical themes with only very occasional excursions into the present. But that was only part of the story. Actuality remained essentially the domain of the news-reels, which grew enormously in importance during the second Five Year Plan.

The work of news-reel cameramen began to cover the country. There were expeditions abroad; cameramen went to Abyssinia



LA BATAILLE DE L'EAU LOURDE (French-Norwegian 1947)  
*Le Trident: directed by TITUS VIBE MÜLLER and JEAN DRÉVILLE*

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PEOPLE IN THE CITY (Swedish 1947)  
*Svensk-Filmindustri: directed by ARNE SUCKSDORFF*



LOOKING FOR THE SUN (Czechoslovak 1948)

Kratky-film: *directed by* PAUL BLUMENFELD



LOCOMOTIVE (Polish 1946)

Film-Polski

## SOVIET DOCUMENTARY

and Spain, where Roman Karmen made the sole record of the last days of Madrid. But the main objective remained a domestic one. The material which came in from the collective farms, from the industrial plants, from the Ukraine and the Asiatic Republics, cataloguing the development of a whole society—made up the weekly news-reels, and also provided the basis for feature-length films devoted primarily to enlarging the progress of the Five Year Plans. Comparatively few of these films have been seen abroad, but they formed and still form an important branch of Soviet film-making. Their production—together with the weekly news-reels—now falls to the Central Documentary Film Studios. This close equation of documentary theory with news-reel techniques is an essential characteristic of the Soviet approach. In retrospect, the explanation is given historical foundations:

‘It was not till a few months before the Soviet Revolution that the first news-reel shots appeared and this date may be taken as the birth of modern Russian documentaries. In March 1917, a reel was first released on the screens, entitled *Fête of Freedom*—this being the first filmshots of the mass demonstration of Moscow workers; at the end of April 1917 appeared the documentary film *The Great Days of Revolution in Moscow*. . . .’

‘Two factors account for Soviet cinematography beginning its creative activities with news-reels: firstly, the world-wide historical implications of the unprecedented events taking place in the newborn Soviet land, events which were to be placed on record for future generations: and secondly, the mobility and operativeness of news-reels as an art.’<sup>1</sup>

What is equally interesting in retrospect is the distance which separates this type of production from the early work of Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Dovjenko, which influenced so directly the approach of documentary film-making in the West. One can find reasons for this development in the form of political and social organisation in the country. With set objectives and agreed methods of reaching them, the function of the film—or of the press or the radio—is very much more to catalogue achievement, report progress, stimulate activity, raise efficiency and improve techniques. The margin of interpretation which is possible, or even necessary, is clearly much reduced. In this

<sup>1</sup> Extracted from *Documentary Films in the U.S.S.R.*, by Kirill Burkovsky, Moscow, 1947.

context the ideological value of news-reels and news-reel techniques is clearly considerable, particularly to implement the day-to-day requirements of official policies. Matters of technical education, on the other hand, are best left to the straightforward scientific or instructional film. The feature entertainment film then becomes a vehicle for supplementing policy in its widest strategical aspects. Richard Griffith makes the same point in his analysis of the shift which took place with the appearance of *Chapaev* (1935) from the intellectualism of the Eisenstein-Pudovkin school:

'the real motivation for the Soviet revolt against typage and montage which, though expressed in theoretical terms, seems actually to have been motivated by the natural propagandist desire to reach larger audiences more intimately and more cogently.'<sup>1</sup>

Incidentally, Griffith notes similar motives in the writings of British documentary film-makers at the same period.

This is very briefly the kind of production pattern which began to emerge in the Soviet Union in the 'thirties. It inevitably affected the styles and techniques of all film-making. Documentary was no exception. Artistically, the adherence to the news-reel as the basis of documentary production can mean a severe limitation in style and approach. The very use of the camera tends to be restricted to general impressions, however powerful any individual shot may be in itself. The reporting camera cannot normally probe and particularise to the extent that is possible under direction. To give continuity and coherence to visuals which have no connection, the commentary may well receive undue prominence, and the appeal of the film subsequently depend more on words than pictures. At the same time it is equally possible for news-reel material, when edited with skill and imagination, to have a power and a feel of immediate contact which is without parallel. Capra's *Why We Fight* series, Rotha's *The World is Rich*, the great Soviet war epics like Karmen's *Siege of Leningrad* and Dovjenko's *Battle for the Ukraine*, have in very different ways shown what can be achieved by the dramatic use of compilation techniques. But the mere fact that a film is composed of shots which are authentic is by itself no foundation on which to assume its success or to erect a theory

<sup>1</sup> *The Film Till Now* (Vision Press, 1949), p. 567.

of film-making. This was the basic weakness of the Dziga-Vertov creed.

One of the best instances of the artistic and technical limitations of this approach was provided by *A Day in the New World* and its successors. On August 24th, 1940, an army of cameramen went into operation to achieve an impression of a typical day's work throughout the whole extent of the Soviet Union. The conception, based on an idea of Maxim Gorki, was vast; so was the organisation required for its execution. Material from 97 cameramen was fed into the news-reel studios in Moscow and out of tens of thousands of feet the directors Mikhail Slutsky and Karmen produced a feature-length film. But the result was disappointing. Despite the intrinsic interest of certain of the sequences and the general impression of vastness, the link of authenticity alone was too weak. There was no really convincing reason why the whole thing should have been shot in a single day.

'The incidents shown are in greater part the sort of thing which could be scripted, planned and even staged at any time. And had it been arranged, by elaborate and careful script-work, that the film should present, in a methodical and imaginative manner, the whole idea of say "The U.S.S.R. in construction and action", the interrelation of social forces in factory, in city and in country under a Socialist regime being clearly and concisely expressed, then the film would have achieved a unity of conception—to say nothing of a dramatic shape—which in its actual form it so badly lacks.'<sup>1</sup>

This review is of interest as a roughly contemporary foreign reaction at a time when interest in the doings of the Soviet Union was beginning to reach a peak. Precisely the same technique was adopted in *A Day of War* (1942) and the post-war *A Day in a Victorious Country* (1948).

By contrast with this narrow interpretation of documentary authenticity, the war-time feature epics stood out as achievements of remarkable skill and power. They revealed the added abilities of feature-directors like Dovzhenko, Yuli Raismann, Sergei Yutkevich and Heifitz and Zarachi. Incidentally, it has been said that this introduction of feature-directors into documentary production was strongly influenced by the example of Capra's success with *The Battle of Russia*, which proved extremely

<sup>1</sup> *Documentary News Letter*, September 1941.

popular in the U.S.S.R. at the time. The passionate and almost indescribable violence and horrors of the fighting on the Russian front were also of a character that could not be escaped. Films like *Defeat of the Germans near Moscow* (1942), *Siege of Leningrad* (1942), *The Battle for the Ukraine* (1943) and *The Battle of Orel* (1943) brought out the cruel anonymity of total war—striking down without pity and without pause, in a way which few other films of this period achieved. In the hands of Dovjenko especially, the material from the battlefronts became a vast piece of orchestration on the one single, relentless theme. It was not personalised in the manner of the Western films, but still full of humanity. It did not attempt to explain a particular phase of the war, but rather to interpret the whole complex of emotions which total war enflames and excites.

The success which films like these achieved set a post-war fashion for feature-documentaries much in the same way as did their Western counterparts.

‘Considering the possibilities of the documentary cinema in giving a large-scale portrayal of reality in full-length films, it is easy to understand what an important weapon in the ideological struggle this branch of cinema constitutes.’<sup>1</sup>

In 1944 Sergei Gerasimov, the feature director who made *New Teacher* (1939), one of the few pre-war films to deal with the contemporary scene, was brought in to reorganise the documentary studios. He was joined by other feature directors and writers presumably with the aim of bringing more cohesion and vitality to their productions and to give added emphasis to the need for more careful preparation and scripting. Films like Raismann’s *Berlin* (1945) appeared and Dovjenko’s *Victory in the Ukraine* (1945). At the same time feature-reconstructions of the war were begun—highly successful in the case of Friedrich Ermler’s *Turning Point* (1946)<sup>2</sup>, a moving tribute to Stalingrad and a dramatic exposition of its significance to the subsequent development of the war, but disappointingly manufactured in its playing-up of Stalin’s omnipotence to the disadvantage of the generals in Petrov’s *The Battle of Stalingrad* (1949). Another interesting piece of reconstruction was the feature-length tribute

<sup>1</sup> M. Rubes, head of the Central Documentary Film Studios, Soviet Art, 7 February, 1947.

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting in this context to recall the earlier comments made about Ermler’s *Counterplan*. See pp. 144, 145.

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*V. I. Lenin* (1948), produced and directed by M. Romm and V. Belyaev.

But the main body of documentary production since the war followed other paths—they have been summaries of achievement like Slutsky's *Soviet Ukraine* (1947) on the progress of reconstruction generally and Belyaev's *Masters of the Great Harvest* (1947), reporting progress on the land. A continuing series has been devoted to the neighbouring countries of Eastern Europe, some produced in collaboration with local units as in the case of *Czechoslovakia* (1950). But, as before, although shooting without a script has been repudiated, they still depend largely on newsreel coverage, with little evidence of individual styles of direction.

Together with the weekly issues of *News of the Day* and a number of special issues devoted to some particular event or ceremony, these films constitute the present output of the Central Documentary Studios in Moscow and their counterparts in the other Republics. The pattern of film-making has in fact returned to its more doctrinaire form, with the added impetus provided by the reorientation of policy in 1948 which ran a cold knife through the deviations of writers, artists, musicians and film-makers alike.

Despite the resulting limitations on technique and approach to the more individual problems of film-making, the Soviet has continued to make a larger and more concentrated use of the film for purposes of education and information than any other single country. To the work of the Documentary Studios must be added a continuous and growing volume of instructional and scientific films of all kinds from the Studios of Popular Science Films. These include film magazines like *Science and Technique*, devoted to the more practically relevant aspects of popular science and *Lectures by Agriculturists* on the techniques of farming, as well as individual productions by Alexander Zguridi, the most outstanding Soviet director in this field, who made *In the Sands of Central Asia*, a fascinating study of animal and insect life in the Kara Kum desert.

To the extent that documentary film-making aims to develop the film as an instrument of social purpose, the Soviet cinema has succeeded. Where it has failed is in its ability to provide within its total organisation for the necessary creative freedoms of interpretation without which the artist's vision can become

cloudy and dull. This is no special problem of the Soviet Union, for there are similar indications elsewhere. It happens that the process is here most developed.

### *Czechoslovakia*

Very quickly after the war the countries of Eastern Europe made an impressive re-entry into the field of film-making. Out of the raw horrors of war and occupation came a string of films like the Czech *Stolen Frontier* and *The Strike*, the Yugoslav *Slavitzka*, the Hungarian *Somewhere in Europe*, and *Border Street* and *The Last Stage* from Poland. These were all feature-length films with a strong sense of documentary realism, violent but moving in their depiction of what war had meant to their peoples. Enthusiasm knew no limits, for only the future lay ahead and the promise of a new world. The parallel with the early days of the Soviet cinema was apparent. But the expansiveness of the immediate post-war period soon passed, for there were other requirements to be met. The job of the film-maker became increasingly and more overtly one of propaganda. The purposes and functions of the new States had to be reinforced and made known. The effect of this development has been most noticeable in the documentary field, where the organisation and style of production has tended more and more to conform to the pattern which had already been established in the Soviet Union.

Czechoslovakia was the first of these countries to enter the field of documentary film-making after the war. All film activities were taken over by the State. The Czechoslovak Film Corporation was formed and within it a Short Film Section (Kratky Film) under the producership of Elmar Klos, who before the war had worked on industrial films for the Bata organisation in Zlin.

As far as equipment and facilities were concerned, Czechoslovakia benefited considerably from the German occupation. Under the Germans the Barrandov Studios in Prague became one of the main European production centres. But in terms of experience and personnel, production was severely handicapped. There were few foundations to build on, except enthusiasm and the need to make films. The pre-war traditions of Czech film-making as a whole were not of much help to a country trying to

face harder realities. They had been lightly romantic in the main, lyrical glorifications of the country's natural beauties. In Gustav Machaty the Czechs had a director of outstanding ability but he was soon tempted to Hollywood; in Voskovec and Werich a fine pair of satirist-comedians, but their main medium remained the theatre. In Hackenschmied they had an expert cameraman, but after working with Hans Burger and Herbert Kline on *Crisis* (1938) he left for America. The one documentary director of promise was Jiri Weiss whose work was already noted in the second edition of this book.<sup>1</sup>

In 1945 the principal problem was this lack of experienced technicians, particularly directors—a shortage which applied as much to feature film as it did to documentary production. Klos, at the Short Film Section, had to improvise and chance his arm, knowing that any documentary director who showed promise, like J. Krejčík and J. Lehovc (one of the pre-war *avant-garde*), would be whisked off to the studios, as he was himself in 1949. All the time the demand for films grew. In 1948 legislation was introduced requiring one short film to be included in every programme. Against these difficulties the achievements of the Short Film Section in the years immediately after the war were considerable. On the other hand, quality often suffered. Too many of the films showed signs of hurried workmanship, inadequate research and scripting, and loose direction. But they retained a feeling of enthusiasm and often showed considerable imagination in their treatment. A number of promising young directors emerged, among them Kurt Goldberger. In Britain during the war, Goldberger returned to Prague with a grasp of what the British documentary school was trying to do. His films have shown a determination to get inside his subject and a clear sense of what he wanted to say, without undue preoccupation with mere technical facility. This incidentally is quite a common weakness in Eastern Europe, where the formalistic eye of the still-cameraman has always tended to dominate the picture. In many Czech and Slovak productions there was in the past a too frequent tendency to rate sheer pictorial quality higher than the overall purpose of the film. Goldberger's *Battle for Coal*, shown at the time of the Czechoslovak Film Festival in London in 1947, compared very favourably with *This Modern Age's* issue *Coal Crisis*, which had just appeared. Although barely a reel in

<sup>1</sup> Vide p. 202.



YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN TOGOLAND (British 1949)  
Colonial Film Unit: *directed by* LIONEL SNAZELLE



DAYBREAK IN UDI (British 1948)  
Crown Film Unit: *directed by* TERRY BISHOP

dist picture. Subsequently, exchange of units and technicians has been restricted to the limits of Eastern Europe.

### *Poland and Eastern Europe*

Developments in Poland have followed a similar pattern to Czechoslovakia, except that the Poles had to start literally from scratch in 1945 with even less pre-war foundations to work on. The task of building their shattered film industry actually began during the war, when a Military Film Unit was established in 1943 under Aleksander Ford to work with the Polish Army in Russia. Their main work was news-reels, but included a compilation film, *The Battle of Lenino*. In 1944 this unit was reorganised as 'Polish Army Film Producers', still concentrating mainly on news-reels. In 1945, with the creation of Film Polski, the whole business of making and exhibiting films began on an organised national basis, but still in the face of extreme difficulties.

'Not one studio, camera, or lens, not one foot of film remained. . . . Some cameras were received as reparation from the Germans; other equipment had to be improvised. A candy factory was converted into a factory for projectors. A gymnasium and an athletic field were requisitioned for a studio. . . .'<sup>1</sup>

Everything, in fact, had to be produced on the spot. Inevitably, news-reels remained the principal activity at first, but some documentary production was started. The work of the feature section naturally took more time to develop.

The revival of production owed a great deal to the survivors of a group of film enthusiasts who had formed in 1930 an *avant-garde* film society 'Start', and later a production co-operative which was responsible pre-war for a number of short films and one or two features. This group included people like Aleksander Ford, Wanda Jakabowska, Eugene Cekalski and Jerzy Toeplitz. Most of them have ultimately moved into feature production. It was Wanda Jakabowska who made *The Last Stage* (1947), a terrible documentation of the life of women internees in Auschwitz, while Ford made *Border Street* (1947) about the tragic end of the Warsaw Ghetto, both of them highly realistic films. Jerzy Toeplitz, on the other hand, became the head of the documentary section. He, too, has shown himself to be fully alive to the

<sup>1</sup> Christine and Eugene Cekalski, 'Polish Film Builds for the Future', *Hollywood Quarterly*, vol. ii, no. 3, April 1947.

## DOCUMENTARY FILM SINCE 1939

potentialities of this kind of film-making, and equally active in maintaining relations with documentary film-makers in other countries. Several foreign directors have worked in the country since the war, among them Eli Lotar who went in 1947 to produce *Recovered Land*, on the life of Polish miners returned from France to the new western territories of Poland.

Given the kind of situation that existed in Poland after the war, it is not surprising that news-reel production should have dominated the scene. Whether the policy of organising documentary production as part of the news-reel section, and in many ways subordinate to it, is a correct one remains to be seen. On the whole, the Polish news-reels have tended to be considerably superior. They are lively and well-composed, and have in fact something to teach many of the established foreign reels. *Flood* (1946), a highly successful impressionistic treatment of the severe flooding of that year, which won an international award at the 1947 Cannes Film Festival, was also the work of news-reel cameramen under the producership of J. Bossak, head of the news-reel department.

Documentary production, although not as extensive so far as in Czechoslovakia, is of the same composition. It also tends to reflect the same shortcomings, since the lack of experienced directors has been a common difficulty. Films like *Apple Blossom Festival*, a spring-time carnival celebrated in the Tatra Mountains, and *Holidays in Poland*, which described the new holiday facilities available for the workers, were too self-conscious in their artistry and social enthusiasm. In contrast to the latter, the Danish film, *People's Holidays*, was infinitely more convincing. Poland's *Shipbuilding Industry*, which had a dramatic theme potentially, i.e. the growth of an industry which was non-existent in pre-war Poland, lacked that sense of urgency and dynamic effort which the news-reels succeed in getting over so well. More successful was the earlier film *Locomotive* (1946), on the rehabilitation of the Polish railways. It remains, however, for the future to show whether Polish documentary production can with added experience overcome its present weaknesses in approach and composition.

In the case of Bulgaria, Rumania, Hungary and Yugoslavia, the fact that none of them had any real film industry pre-war has given an added incentive to the film-maker. But as far as can be judged from the few films which have become available abroad,

progress is being made in learning the use of the documentary medium. In Yugoslavia film-making first started in 1942 when a group of partisans captured a German news-reel camera. With the acquisition of some stock and equipment a film unit was established. Thereafter everything had to be learnt by trial and error. Later, in 1945, a Five Year Plan for national film production was introduced. However amateurish the methods, the enthusiasm was enormous. Patriotic and heroic themes dominated, in films like *Youth Railway*, a crude and repetitive but forceful account of pioneering effort, and *Youth Parade*. Considerable expansion of documentary production is planned. In Bulgaria, enthusiasm has been almost as considerable. *People in the Clouds*, a film about the work of meteorological stations, won a prize in Venice in 1947, but in pictures like *Happy Days*, *Village Wedding* and *New Men* inspiration has so far tended to remain at the travelogue level with the addition of the current political idiom to keep up with the times. Documentary production in Hungary has shown greater skill and a deeper sense of purpose in films like *The Tractors Arrive* on the work of agricultural machinery stations, and *Zala Country* on the effects of land reform. Geza Radvani's feature-length film *Somewhere in Europe* (1947), which dramatised the sufferings of Europe's children, has proved highly successful, but its promising first half was spoilt by an escapist, almost Hollywood, solution to the problem.

Lack of experience in these countries is not, however, the only problem. The fact that Eastern Europe has given its peoples as a whole a greater degree of economic justice than they ever had pre-war does not in itself provide the documentary film-maker with adequate stimulus, unless he has at the same time some ability and latitude in interpreting the subjects with which he has to deal. Inevitably, there will always be many utility films to be made—specialised films for farmers or factory workers, films about the production drive—as is found in most countries. What Eastern Europe lacks so far is some deeper impression of the particular kind of economic and social co-operation which is taking place. With the exception of Ivens's feature-length film *The First Years* (1949), which was made in four languages and described the life and peoples of Czechoslovakia, Poland and Bulgaria since the war, this wider function of documentary film-making appears to have gone by default.

*Australia*

When Grierson made his round trip of the British Commonwealth in 1939 for the Imperial Relations Trust, he not only laid the foundations for the National Film Board in Canada, he also touched off the spark of documentary film-making in the South Pacific. In Australia the first and immediate reaction was the formation of the New South Wales Documentary Film Council in 1940 with Professor Stout, once an active member of the Edinburgh Film Guild, and John Heyer, a young director, providing the initiative. British films like *Target for To-night* and *London Can Take It* added new interest when they appeared on Australian screens. Until the war ended progress was limited; Government film-making, which was once the province of the Department of Commerce dealing only in the golden virtues of Australian farm produce, was switched to the newly-formed Ministry of Information. But the best pictures of the war period were based on material sent in by battle-front cameramen. One technician was outstanding, Damien Parer, who was responsible for the coverage of the Japanese thrust in 1942 which almost broke through to Australia. *Kokoda Trail* was in fact one of the most impressive of the war news-reels from this area. Parer was killed in action in 1944.

With the end of the war the Australian Government started to tackle the job of organising documentary production on a stable footing. A National Film Board was established following the example of Canada, though significantly different in status. It has remained much more of a planning committee, relying for executive functions on the Films Department of the Ministry of Information, not altogether a happy arrangement. The first Film Commissioner to be appointed in 1946 was Ralph Foster, on loan for a year from Canada. The initial task was to find personnel. Foster recruited young writers and production assistants and brought back directors who had drifted away during the war. The presence of Harry Watt who was preparing for the production of *The Overlanders* and of Joris Ivens in retreat from Indonesia, was a powerful help. John Heyer, in fact, worked with Watt during the production of his Australian film. Later Stanley Hawes, who during the war had left Britain to join Grierson in Canada, was in turn invited to fill the post of Chief Producer to the Board, though until recently he was not a Board member.



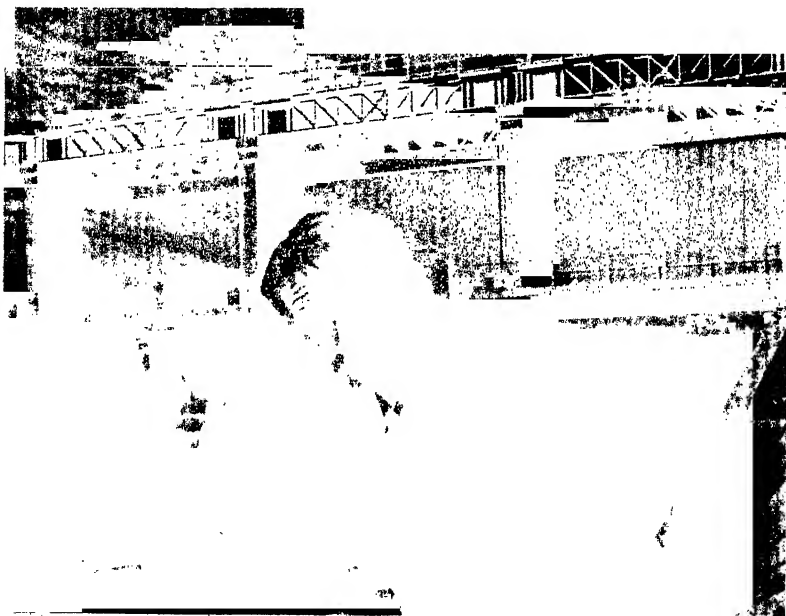
KURVANDI ROAD (Indian 1948)  
Documentary Unit India: *directed by* PAUL ZILS



CHILD (Indian 1947-48)  
United Nations Film Board: *directed by* PAUL ZILS



SCHOOL IN THE MAILBOX (Australian 1946)  
Australian National Film Board: *directed by* STANLEY HAWES



THE VALLEY IS OURS (Australian 1949)  
Australian National Film Board: *directed by* JOHN HEYER

## AUSTRALIAN DOCUMENTARY

Equipment was in short supply, too, and in the early years work had to proceed with only limited technical resources. But soon in the films of Heyer, Maslyn Williams, Geoffrey Collins and Hawes himself, as well as young directors like Lee Robinson and Lionel Trainor, there was evidence of what Australia could produce.

The most successful of the Board's early productions was Heyer's *Native Earth* (1946), a skilful piece of *reportage* about the reconstruction of Australian administration in New Guinea. Heyer, in fact, has since emerged as the most intelligent and imaginative of the younger Australian directors. His *Journey of a Nation* (1947) was a lively indictment of the Australian railways' battle of the gauges and of the waste to the country's economy which results from the need to tranship all goods and people at every State frontier. *The Valley is Ours* (1949) was Heyer's most ambitious film to date. A five-reeler, it presented the case for the unified control of the Murray River and the development of its resources on TVA lines. There were inevitable resemblances in treatment to Lorentz's *The River*, though certain of the more superficial similarities—like the semi-poetic catalogue of the tributary rivers—might have been avoided. The film, however, was well and intelligently made. Heyer is a director who is clearly aware of his own capacities and the scope of his medium. After a spell of nearly a year in Britain, Heyer left the Film Board and in 1949 took charge of a new Shell Film Unit in Australia. Geoffrey Bell had in the meantime gone out from Film Centre, London, to break the ground with a first series of films for Shell, which included two films on soil erosion—*Hold the Land* (1950) and *Farming for the Future* (1950).

Hawes, though acting principally as the Board's producer, has directed one or two films himself, among them *School in the Mail-box* (1946), a simple description of the school correspondence courses which serve children living in the remote farms of the outback, and made in answer to a request from Unesco. It had many of the characteristics of the best in Australian documentary production—unpretentious and down-to-earth, but infused with sun, a feeling of expansiveness and shrewd sense of what life is about.

By 1949 the Film Board had grown to the extent that it could begin to think in terms of an ambitious three-year programme. In addition to the regular monthly issue of *Australian Diary*,

directed by Jack Allan, a growing number of films have been made for other Government departments. But the difficulties are still substantial. The Department of Information has been dissolved and the Film Section transferred to the Department of Interior. The lack of skilled directors is still a drag on production, while the general shift in the Australian political and social field has had its effects. There is a limited amount of production by private units and some industrial sponsorship to which Shell has given a new lead. Nevertheless, the National Film Board—despite its difficulties—still remains the centre of documentary development in the Australian continent.

### *New Zealand*

The story in New Zealand follows along parallel lines, though the scale of operation has inevitably been smaller. The New Zealand Government had its own film studios pre-war and made the same kind of publicity and tourist films as Australia. The visit of Grierson likewise produced a shift in emphasis. The National Film Unit was created in 1941, and a former journalist, Stanhope Andrews, came in as producer. The unit started almost immediately, in the face of considerable technical difficulties, to produce *Weekly Review*, a one-reel screen magazine for the cinemas. *Weekly Review* was never intended as a news-reel in the orthodox sense, nor has it tried to cover much spot-news, though in fact there is no commercial news-reel in the country. It was initially the only way of getting New Zealand on to the screen at a time when it was of paramount importance to the country's prestige to have its case presented at home and abroad. However, it did provide a jumping-off point for more ambitious productions. Increasingly larger items appeared and occasionally the whole reel was devoted to a single subject.

By the end of the war the unit was in a position to embark on the separate production of single films. Alan Falconer's *Backblock's Medical Service*, Roger Miram's farming film *Molesworth* (he was later to start his own unit, Pacific Film Unit), *White Island* (1947) an account of a scientific expedition to a volcanic island, shot and directed by Ivo Tisch, James Harris's scientific studies like *Camera on Ruapehu* and Michael Furlong's *Housing in New Zealand* and his dance film *Rhythm and Movement* (1948) represented the best in New Zealand production since the war. Like

the Australians they are simple and down-to-earth in the way they treat their subjects and use their cameras. They have inherited none of the more pretentious pre-war legacies which have reappeared somewhat disconcertingly in the younger European documentary school. In 1948 Margaret Thompson, who had directed a number of the Realist Film Unit's childrens films in Britain, went out to New Zealand for a year, adding among other productions, *The First Two Years at School* (1948). Recently, Michael Furlong moved into more ambitious fields with a feature documentary, *Journey for Three* (1948), a story of three British immigrants, a man and two girls. The film was set in a minor key, but the sequences in the remote construction camp to which the man is sent were lively and convincingly portrayed. Though there was a certain woodenness in places, the picture had honesty.

### *The Middle East and Africa*

One of the most important features of documentary film-making during and especially since the war is its extension to regions which hitherto had remained remote and undeveloped. The initial problem in areas like the Middle East, Africa, India and the Far East generally, has been the low level of economic development and social awareness which documentary production, as much as any other activity, requires for its sponsorship and use. The effect of a global war, and the dissolution of the old-style colonial imperialism which followed, was to create in many parts of the world new tensions and new opportunities. The more constructive work of the U.N. agencies, the various technical assistance programmes for the development of backward areas, and the sharpened political conflict post-war with the contending parties out to prove the social effectiveness of their respective philosophies, have added a further concentration of interest.

The style of documentary film-making as it has begun to develop in these areas has, however, been more obviously practical in its application. The exotic charm of the primitive—always the delight of every travel film-maker—is no longer the sole consideration. The need to utilise every available means for improving farming and industrial practice, or standards of health and education, provides the principal motive. At the same time the opportunity exists for making films of a more descriptive

kind for showing to the world outside something of the problems and achievements of one or other area. It is characteristic that *This Modern Age* should have devoted so many of its issues to subjects in the West Indies, India, Ceylon, East Africa, Palestine and Turkey. Film units and film-makers generally have moved about these areas of the world to an increasing extent. In the first instance at least, foreign units and technicians are essential to give a lead and direction to local production.

In the Middle East the establishment of the Middle East Supply Centre during the war introduced the element of economic organisation to the area. The extent and importance of the work done was well represented in the excellent British Ministry of Information film *Today & Tomorrow* (1944), directed by Robin Carruthers from a script by Arthur Calder-Marshall. A local Ministry of Information film service was also established in Cairo to cover the same area—a few compilation and news films were produced. Subsequent development since the war has, however, been slow in the Arab countries. Egypt, with considerable production resources at the Misr studios, has continued to produce a growing number of features in Arabic, but only a small handful of educational films, mainly sponsored by the Ministry of Public Health. In 1951, however, Unesco sent out Alex Shaw as part of a technical assistance mission. In Turkey, the nucleus of a Government film unit has been established, but with limited technical resources and no more than one or two qualified technicians, little has so far emerged apart from news-reel material. A further Unesco film mission was set up in 1951 under an Austrian producer, Hübl.

Israel, on the other hand, with its religious and economic affiliations abroad, was already the subject of a number of films pre-war. But apart from the persistent endeavours of Nathan Akselrod—who produced several features and documentaries and a monthly news-reel *Carmel Film*, sponsored by the Jewish Agency, production has been sporadic. Although a number of films were made primarily to enlarge the Jewish case abroad, only a few of the more ambitious have achieved any reputation outside the country. *The House in the Desert* (1947), produced by Palestine Film Productions under a South African—Norman Lourie—until recently one of the few remaining private units, was a dramatised account of one of the settlements on the Dead Sea. In 1947, the Pole, Josef Leytes, at the instigation of the

## ISRAELI AND AFRICAN DOCUMENTARY

Jewish National Fund, produced *The Great Promise*, based on three stories told by Jewish soldiers to refugees in a liberated camp in Europe. About the same time Herbert Kline and Meyer Levine went from the U.S.A. to Palestine to make *My Father's House*. It told the story of a small Jewish boy and a Jewish woman landing in Palestine after the war to seek a new life. *Adamah* (1948), shown under the English title of *Tomorrow's a Wonderful Day*, was a much more moving and convincing film about the Ben Shemen Children's Village. Sponsored by the Hadassah Medical Organisation, it was the work of a mixed group directed by Helmar Lerski (the German cameraman who worked on *Waxworks* in 1924), and produced by Otto Sonnenfeld, who was also the producer of Machaty's *Extase* (1933) in Czechoslovakia. The work of the Children's Village was personalised by the experience of one orphan boy who arrived from Europe, distrusting every human motive and convinced that he has been interned in yet another camp from which there is no escape. As a psychological study it was almost the equal in one or two sequences of *The Quiet One*. Its technique of presentation also had certain similarities. The commentary was the boy's voice dramatising his own fears and gradually his growing sense of confidence and trust. Although the conclusion became over-sentimentally nationalistic, the film itself was ably and convincingly directed. In 1950, the Israeli State established an official film unit, the Educational Film Centre.

In the African continent the spread of any kind of indigenous film-making has been vastly slower. South Africa began to develop a limited amount of documentary production during the war—officially through the State Information Office and the Army Film Unit. Subsequently the idea of a National Film Board along Canadian lines has come up, primarily as a result of an official visit by John Grierson in 1949. Actual output, however, has so far been limited to a few Government-sponsored films, chiefly tourist in character, and occasional commercial productions, the latter being increasingly restricted, while the death of the most promising documentary director—Leon Schauder, who had worked in Britain at the beginning of the war—was a setback. In 1950, two young men from Britain, Donald Swanson and Pennington-Richards (a feature cameraman), made a delightful comedy using a non-professional cast in the Shanteytown area of Johannesburg. With an attractive and

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simple music track, this second-feature length picture, called *The Magic Garden*, was a refreshing use of the realist approach. It has won wide praise.

The chief source of films for British territories in Africa has been the Colonial Film Unit. Established in 1939 initially to provide films about the progress of the war, the Unit has developed more and more along educational lines. Its output has included informational and instructional films on farm practice, health and social welfare and similar domestic needs, as well as regular news magazines for distribution among African audiences. The value of the film to give instruction to illiterate peoples has at least been proved, though in the case of the Colonial Film Unit there has been certain criticism of the approach and technical quality of the films actually produced. Latterly, the unit, which has been based in London, has been increasingly decentralised. Local units have been established in West, East and Central Africa. Training courses for African technicians have also been started in the Gold Coast and other territories.

A similar shift away from travelogues towards the educational uses of the film has taken place in French African territories and in the Belgian Congo. But in all cases the physical problems which have to be overcome are enormous. Not only must all the means and skills to make films first be brought in from abroad, but also the equipment to show them. Nevertheless, this field of film-making has already shown itself to be one of the most important. Here the need is unlimited, and at least there is some agreement amid all the dissensions of a confused world that it should be met. In some way it is a translation into world terms of the pre-war argument that a country cannot maintain its health if it has poverty, ignorance and disease in its midst. In that climate of opinion there is the economic possibility for documentary production.

### *The Far East*

In the Far East the pattern of development has followed along somewhat similar lines over the past ten years, but with considerably more indigenous production. It is often overlooked that Japan was producing more entertainment films pre-war than the United States, while in India, too, and parts of South-East Asia there was by European standards quite a considerable volume of commercial film production.

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The most substantial evidence of documentary enterprise has, however, been provided by India. In the early stages of the war the Government of India set up Information Films of India (I.F.I.). Alex Shaw went out from Britain for a time to organise and assist its production, to be followed by Jack Holmes, who was also loaned as a technical adviser, and his wife Winifred Holmes. I.F.I. ran under considerable outside pressure and criticism. It was no easy task to make official films at that particular time in India's history—that is, until the beginning of 1946. Nevertheless quite a considerable number of films were made under the skilful and intelligent producership of Ezra Mir. So long as the war emphasis was uppermost, I.F.I.'s task was often invidious; Indian audiences are reputed to have shut their eyes or walked out during the showing of the early war shorts. But this emphasis gradually shifted and for the first time Indian audiences began to see something of life in their own country on the cinema screen. The dances and architecture, the crafts and skills of India formed the subjects of many of these films. *Our Heritage* (1943) was a survey of Indian architecture, *The Tree of Wealth* (1944) dealt with the coconut trees of South India and *The Conquest of the Dry Lands* (1944) on irrigation in the Punjab—all well shot and simply directed for the most part, though there was often an evident yearning for glossy finishes. The only technicians available came from the commercial feature studios with very different standards of value.

By the time I.F.I. was wound up in 1946—the inept result of political pressures just prior to the transfer of power—it had succeeded in establishing the practice of documentary film-making in the continent of India. It had produced a considerable number of simple information films which added to Indian understanding of the vast kaleidoscope which was at last to become their country. In the final year a start was made too on the practical problems of ill-health and illiteracy.

After a period of one year's interregnum the new Indian Government formed its own film unit—Indian Documentary Film (I.D.F.) and a certain number of I.F.I. technicians were grouped together again under the producership of M. Bhavnani. I.D.F. comprises six units, one to produce instructional films for the villages, another to make films for distribution abroad, another for schools, while others concentrate on cinema distribution. Broadly, the pattern of production conforms to the normal

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requirements of post-war official information policies—production drives and increased efficiencies—*War on Waste* (1949) on better food preservation, *Fibres to Fabrics* (1949) and *The Cup that Cheers* (1949). A news-reel, *Indian News Review*, appears weekly. There have been several impressive attempts to grapple with India's enormous health and welfare problems—*Planned Parenthood* (1949) and *Blossoms Revived* (1949), a moving film directed by Krishna Gopal on the treatment of poliomyelitis. The style of film-making is simple, and story techniques are frequently used to gain a readier understanding from audiences.

Apart from I.D.F. there is one independent unit, Documentary Unit India, which has achieved a considerable reputation. Under the direction of Paul Zils, it has contributed a number of films fully adapted to the country's needs but at the same time well and imaginatively made. For the United Nations Zils made three films in 1948—*Mother, Child and Community*—to tell the story of social welfare in the villages. In each case the treatment was personal and direct, the extent and difficulties of the work being dramatised through the experience of one health-worker. In the same way *Kurundi Road*, which was a simple account of the rivalry between two villages in the building of a road, made its point not by bald didactic assertion, but by dramatic contrast between the villagers' labours and the immediate practical results which their new road could bring. A certain amount of industrial sponsorship is also beginning to develop. Zils's *A Tiny Thing Brings Death* (1949) for I.C.I. on the ravages of malaria was one of the best examples, despite a disastrous piece of sponsorial pressure to insert a direct advertising 'plug'. In 1950 Zils completed his first feature-length film, *Our India*, based on the well-known book by Mino0 Masanri. Other feature documentaries have also been made, following the moving example of *Children of the Earth* (1946). Sponsored by the Indian People's Theatre Association and directed by Ahmed Abbas, it presented in all its horror and misery the grim tragedy of the Bengal Famine of 1944.

Inevitably there are shortcomings and complaints. Finance is still in short supply; the independent producers have felt that the Government does not know how to utilise their resources. Cinema distribution has become increasingly restricted with the requirement that exhibitors must show 'approved' documentary films. Non-theatrical machinery is still a skeleton of what it could

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and should be. But above all there is vitality in the Indian scene, films are being made with enthusiasm, the ground is new and the horizon is the limit. Zils, with Mulk Raj Anand, started in 1949 a lively periodical, *Indian Documentary*, to comment and report progress at home and abroad. Here at least is one of the certain growing points of documentary film-making in the post-war world.

In Pakistan, by contrast, little has so far been achieved since 1947. The country generally lacks industrial resources; most of the continent's film-making skills pre-war—Moslem as well as Hindu—were originally developed in India. Nevertheless, Pakistan has ambitious plans for creating its own documentary production centre. In Ceylon, too, the Government has recently established a film unit which, in addition to a fortnightly review, issues occasionally separate productions. In 1951, Ralph Keene went out from Britain to join the unit as producer.

In Malaya, the Colonial Government set up an information film unit in the closing years of the war. A group of film-makers, among them Ralph Elton, was brought out from Britain to assist in its establishment. After a promising start the unit fell into the doldrums. Finance was needed to put its work on a more stable basis; while the worsened political situation added considerably to the difficulties. In 1950 Stanley Hawes went from Australia to advise on its future development.

Burma has suffered similarly, though production has been more extensive and in origin goes back to just before the war. Indonesia, on the other hand, after the final settlement with the Netherlands Government, has begun to embark on ambitious schemes for production. An Indonesian Film Corporation has been established. Plans have been laid to recruit the assistance of foreign technicians and to develop documentary film-making as a part of the Republic's information and education programme. Unesco has recently sent R. Neilson Baxter there from London.

The story of production in China is as confused and chaotic as its history over the past twenty years. Although the feature industry managed to survive in one form or another, documentary film-making hardly made a start before the war. There was some foreign production—by the American Harmon Foundation and by China Film Enterprises of America—almost exclusively of films descriptive of Chinese art and institutions. During the war the Chinese Ministry of Information sponsored a few films

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on the country's current plight. A limited amount of production was also started in the areas under Communist administration; the first documentary film was made in Yenai in 1939. Subsequently production has been reorganised and developed despite enormous difficulties. In 1949 the new Government announced an ambitious programme for all sections of the film industry.

Although with the exception of India the story of actual achievement in the Far East has so far been limited, documentary film-making has already assumed new importance. Initially, foreign technicians may be required to get production under way and to assist in the training of local units. In this sense the older documentary centres in Europe and America have still a direct contribution to make.

### (ii) *North and Latin America*

by RICHARD GRIFFITH

#### *United States*

In striking contrast to the British record, American documentary has come into being largely as a result of the efforts of isolated individuals. Even more striking is the fact that Government and industry, the mainstay of the British movement, have on the whole been cool, if not actually hostile, to documentary in the United States and to the concept of public information which it exemplifies.

The first real chance was provided by the Roosevelt revolution; while Pare Lorentz was the first to see the opportunity and to act upon it. In 1936 his *Plow That Broke the Plains* and two years later, *The River*, opened the way for big-time Government sponsorship. They showed the worlds of education and business what could be accomplished in their own interest both inside and outside the theatres. A United States Film Service was set up, with Lorentz at its head. While it had no power to initiate films of its own, it could and did stimulate the various Government departments into dropping their limited programmes of instructional films in favour of backing important documentaries devoted to forwarding the philosophy of the New Deal. Flaherty, Ivens, and others were hired; *Power and the Land*, *The Land*, and *Fight for Life* were made. But the new programme had no chance to get

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started. A Congress growing increasingly restive under Roosevelt's rule investigated the new agency and killed it out of hand. The documentary makers were suddenly thrown back upon non-Governmental sources of sponsorship. But industry and advertising circles were suspicious of a film form which had come into prominence under New Deal auspices. The academic world, except for a few gestures, was cautious. Most important, the documentary makers themselves instinctively drew back from the job of selling the propagandist potential of documentary to the alien worlds of politics and business.

At this point there appeared on the scene the promising figure of Mary Losey.<sup>1</sup> Grierson, Baird, Rotha and Anstey had visited the United States, and she came under the influence of their ideas—or rather was struck by their affinity to her own. After a visit to England in 1939, she set to work after the Grierson pattern to organise the jangling sects of American documentary into a purposeful group geared to attack the citadels of sponsorship and distribution. The Association of Documentary Film Producers was formed, with Mary Losey as secretary. But World War II was too close. Even before Pearl Harbour, the documentary people had been drawn into some war-related activity, and by 1942 the members of the Association were dispersed to the ends of the earth and the Association itself disbanded. It has never been re-formed. The seed of unity that had been planted had no time to take root. This appeared no tragedy. It seemed that documentary and its exponents at last were about to come into their own, although the event proved otherwise.

Throughout the war years a volume of factual film production and distribution was certainly undertaken on a gigantic scale by the Armed Services.<sup>2</sup> The kinds of films made were numerous. They included at one level record films to provide briefing for pilots, combat reports for staff use, material for the news-reels and for films like William Wyler's *Memphis Belle*. There were training films ranging from those at the simplest demonstrational level (how to service an aeroplane or to repair Army boots) to others giving instruction on the complexities of radar, or the disassembly of a 155 mm. gun. The *Army-Navy Screen Magazine* circulated regularly throughout the Armed Services. Other quite different kinds of films sought to affect opinions and behaviour,

<sup>1</sup> Since 1950, Films Officer to the World Health Organisation.

<sup>2</sup> For a fuller description of this phase, see Appendix I pp. 344-358.

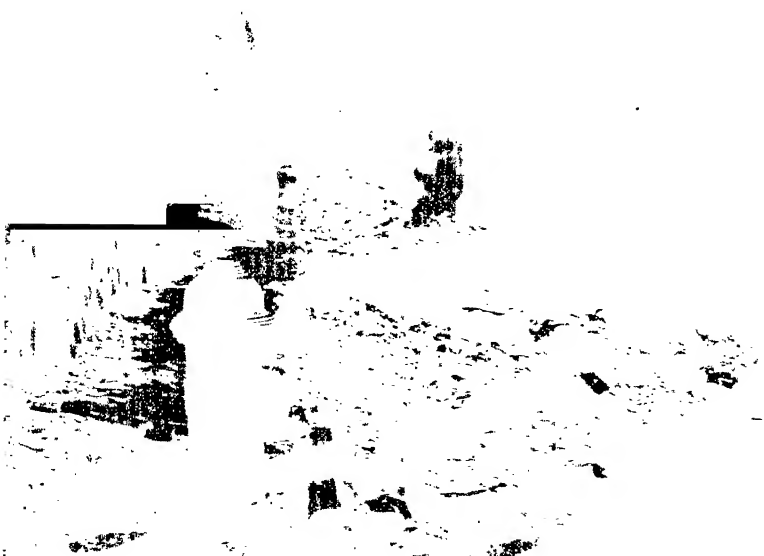
and to influence the fighting man's approach to actual combat, to allied nationals, to Negro troops, to civilian war-workers at home—or to furnish information as to the origins and therefore the inevitability and rightness of the conflict itself. There were also incentive films, addressed to the general public, like *The Enemy Strikes*, made after the Germans broke through the Ardennes or, more impressively, the Anglo-American *True Glory*. Yet a third group of films, and these were numerous, concerned themselves with the progress and problems of the war itself. At no time since cinematography was invented had the motion picture been so lavishly or energetically used in the services of adult education.

The most widely publicised series was undoubtedly the Army's *Why We Fight* feature-length pictures, made under the supervision of Col. Frank Capra. Every member of the armed forces was required to see these before going overseas. Some of them were shown to civilian audiences in the U.S.A. and abroad. They were specifically intended to give the fighting man an account of world history from the Treaty of Versailles to America's entry into World War II, since it was found that the general knowledge of the average draftee on any such subject was poor indeed. The whole series was compiled entirely from existing documentary and news-reel film, drawn from every conceivable source including the enemy, put together after considerable study, and furnished with a narrative commentary.<sup>1</sup> The first three films, *Prelude to War*, *The Nazis Strike* and *Divide and Conquer*, covered the period 1918 to 1941. An even more

<sup>1</sup> The prolonged, repeated study and examination of existing documentary films (*The Spanish Earth*, *The River*, *Target for Tonight*, *Triumph of the Will*, *The City*) which this method entailed gave this production group a familiarity with documentary techniques and led them to break completely with the techniques of fictional dramatisation, not only for this series but even more notably in subsequent orientation films which were wholly produced, not compiled from existing material. This was what made their pictures more convincing than comparable films made for the Air Force or the Navy by groups which had not been so indoctrinated and who therefore tended to use actors instead of real people, studio lighting and gloss instead of a realistic appearance, and a fictional style instead of the documentary one. Moreover, two famous Hollywood directors, Alfred Hitchcock and Ernst Lubitsch, who also made such films without studying documentary techniques at all, without considering the problems to be faced in dealing with facts instead of fantasies, set about their task exactly as though they were making regular Hollywood pictures. In each case the results were so deplorable, the films failed so utterly to convey the intended effect, that they were scrapped without being shown.



WAR TOWN (American 1943)  
O.W.I.: *directed by WILLARD VAN DYKE*



A PLACE TO LIVE (American 1941)  
Philadelphia Housing Association: *directed by IRVING LERNER*



THE RAMPARTS WE WATCH (American 1940)

March of Time: *directed by* LOUIS DE ROCHEMONT



NEWS REVIEW No. 2 (American 1944)

O.W.I. Overseas Branch: *edited by* HELEN VAN DONGEN

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detailed examination and recapitulation of the tremendous changes in American opinions and attitudes, as well as of the conflicting impulses and ideologies that shaped them, was given in the seventh and last film of the series *War Comes to America*. The formidable power of the film medium can be seen at its source in the inexorable effect of these manipulations of slabs of fact, originally seen in another context or none. That these films were vital to the prosecution of the war there can be no doubt.

The cessation of war saw a cessation not only in film production of a more general type but also of distribution, particularly as regards the general public.

The productions of the Army and Navy, remarkable and important though they were, do not, however, really fall into the historic reading of documentary.<sup>1</sup> They established that films can teach and inform: but it is not clearly realised, perhaps, that the level of such teaching and information was mostly restricted to technical instruction or to purely factual information about the war. Indeed it could be said that the war suspended rather than continued the development of the American documentary film proper, with the exception of the film production of the Office of War Information's Overseas Branch and occasionally that of the Co-ordinator of Inter-American Affairs, the sole agencies where films in the pre-war tradition were produced by men who had previously worked and gained eminence in the documentary field.

The reasons for this are well exemplified in the troubled history of the Office of War Information's domestic film branch which almost from start aroused the suspicion and antagonism of Congress. Apparently the very fact that the purpose of the agency was to provide information for domestic consumption was sufficient to put it under a cloud. What went on behind the scenes can only be conjectured. At any rate, in June 1943, Congress cut the appropriation for O.W.I.'s Domestic Motion Picture Bureau from \$1,222,904 to \$50,000, and this specifically to 'carry on liaison activities between the Government and the Hollywood film industry'.

If the O.W.I. Overseas Motion Picture Branch survived the fate of its domestic brother, and under the leadership of Robert Riskin, Phillip Dunne and Irving Lerner flourished and expanded, this was doubtless due to its unique function which took

<sup>1</sup> Vide Appendix I.

it out of the area of controversy. Congress, while it might fear the effects of 'propaganda' upon U.S. citizens, was not at all averse to subjecting the rest of the world to filmic disquisitions upon the merits of the American 'way of life', nor did the Hollywood film industry have any reason to fear competition from this quarter.

Almost immediately after VJ-day, in striking contrast to what was happening elsewhere in the world, the film units of all American civilian Government agencies were either abolished or returned to their former limited status, turning out highly specialised instructional films. The sole exception was that the remains of the O.W.I. Overseas Film Unit were turned over to the State Department, where they were eventually incorporated into the United States Information Service.

The Division of International Motion Pictures which resulted is today in a position not unlike that which the Empire Marketing Board faced in Britain during the early 'thirties.<sup>1</sup> While this fact may provoke unthinking scorn in certain quarters, it should be observed that the Division provides the only growing point for documentary within the U.S. Government framework, the only effectual opportunity for the film-maker to play a part in national affairs.

Expanding slowly at first, the State Department programme has to date offered work only to the major pre-war documentary makers and to few others. For the rest, the early post-war period proved a lean time. Scores of young men who received their film training in the Services were at first sanguine of their future. They formed themselves into a myriad of production units which competed intensely for what business occasionally offered itself, and mostly lost it. Discouraged and bewildered, some of them drifted to Hollywood, while others rejoined the Army and resumed the now rather dull business of making films for peacetime soldiers. All gave up their independence and most of what interest they had in the documentary form and purpose.

To more experienced and battered heads, it seemed that the answer might be to combine sponsored films with production which could pay-off in the theatres and non-theatrically. *March of Time* seemed to show the way. This was Grierson's idea when he moved from Canada to New York to set up *World Today*, with Stuart Legg and Raymond Spottiswoode as producers and Mary Losey as liaison with sponsors and distributors. *World Today's*

<sup>1</sup> *vide* pp. 96-100.

strategy aimed to repeat the successful Canadian pattern, that is to say, to promote a monthly theatrical series comparable to *World in Action*, backed up by non-theatrical sponsored films made for special purposes. But Grierson's financial operating margin was too small and when his theatrical distributors, United Artists, decided to abandon the short-subjects field, the results were crippling.

What can be done with the same plan and with adequate backing has since been demonstrated by Louis de Rochemont. While still with the *March of Time*, de Rochemont produced one of the first re-enacted documentaries of actual history, *The Ramparts We Watch* (1940), a worthy forerunner of the *Why We Fight* series. Towards the end of the war he joined 20th Century-Fox as a producer and there made *The House on 92nd Street*, *13 Rue Madeleine* and *Boomerang!*, first of the current Hollywood cycle of 'semi-documentaries' and still unsurpassed in the genre. The latter's success, concurrent with an invitation to make classroom films for release by United World (Universal-International's and J. Arthur Rank's non-theatrical outlet), led to an operation unprecedented in the American film industry. For the first time, the theatrical film for profit, the sponsored film for advertising or public relations purposes, and the non-theatrical film for profit were being made under what was essentially one roof—Louis de Rochemont Associates Inc. The results, from an informational point of view, have been mixed. De Rochemont's contribution to the current cycle of films about Negroes, the intelligent and courageous *Lost Boundaries*, made its way through the theatres against the grain of current practice, and was highly profitable. The sponsored publicity films paid their way and paved the way for others. The 'humangeography' series—*Earth and Its Peoples*—has been disappointing. Though made by technicians of the first rank (John Ferno, Victor Vicas, Jules Bucher, Richard Leacock, Leo Seltzer and others) they have, with a few exceptions like *Malaya*, tended to emerge as elementary visualisations-of-commentary little superior to the routine classroom film of weary familiarity, despite the ministrations of excellent craftsmen like Thomas Orchard and Lothar Wolff. There is, nevertheless, little doubt that the series will earn money and stimulate a demand for further classroom films.

It is to be noted that, on the non-theatrical side, de Rochemont conformed to the general feeling that the classroom is the

only sure source of profitable returns. Certainly this idea alone has attracted major finance into the field. In spite of the example of the war-time documentaries, the only factual film project which has enlisted Hollywood's post-war attention was the Motion Picture Association's guarded attempt to discover whether teaching films could be made to the satisfaction of teachers. There is potential profit in the non-theatrical market, and it is being determinedly pursued by groups whose interest is profit only. American textbook publishers, alive to the threat to their product represented by the school film, underwrote a famous report which concluded that the only way to meet the threat was to enter production themselves, linking the films they make to the books they publish. Pioneering here was done by McGraw-Hill, the successful specialist publishing house, under the able leadership of Albert Rosenberg.

The sponsored film, however, remains a necessity. Post-war developments in this area have at least been more realistically related to the patterns of American life than was previously the case. One of the most significant is the Southern Educational Film Association. With the vigorous aid of Mary Losey and under the direction of Nick Read, a graduate of the Canadian Film Board, this Association was set up to meet the school and adult education needs of several Southern States. It is officially supported by these States and is charged with the responsibility of planning film programmes based on their actual informational needs. Though its films are modestly financed (*Feeling All Right* is the best of them), and despite reported dissensions and Read's departure, the project survives and continues to show promise of effectiveness through its increasing adjustment to the actualities of Southern life.

Educational foundations were among the first sources of finance to which the documentary makers turned in the 1930s, in the hope that a production base might be established independent of either Government or business. Nothing came of these efforts until after the war. In 1945, the agile and tireless Julien Bryan succeeded in inducing the Davella Mills Foundation to provide a grant to finance an International Film Foundation set up 'to present and interpret other nations and peoples to the American people and the American people to others'. Bryan gathered about him old colleagues and new talents—Jules Bucher, Ray Blackwell, Francis Thompson, Phillip Stapp, Gene



MEMPHIS BELLE (American 1944)  
U.S. Air Force: *directed by* WILLIAM WYLER



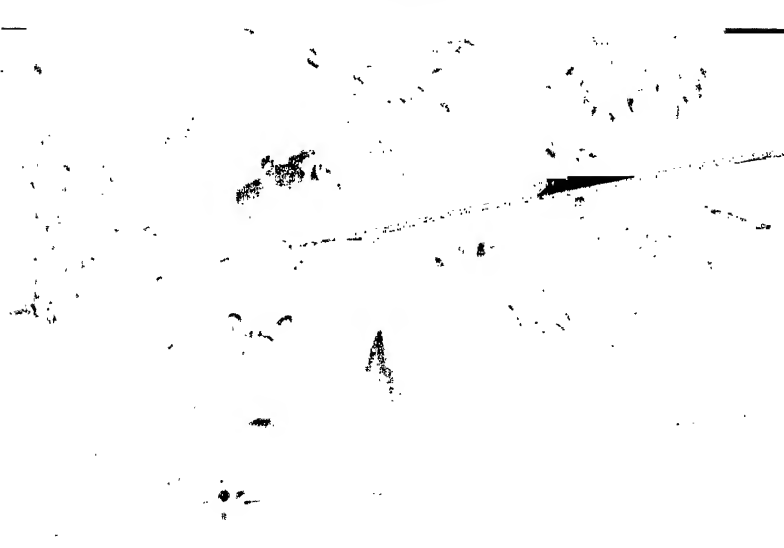
POWER AND THE LAND (American 1940)  
U.S. Film Service: *directed by* JORIS IVENS



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THE QUIET ONE (American 1949)  
Film Documents Inc.: *directed by* SIDNEY MEYERS

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LOUISIANA STORY (American 1946-48)  
Robert J. Flaherty Productions: *directed by* ROBERT J. FLAHERTY

## AMERICAN DOCUMENTARY

Forrell—and launched an ambitious programme beginning with a film series on Russia and her satellites, Italy, China and Japan. I.F.F. is now said to be established on a self-supporting basis, independent of its original grant. This means that, for the first time in the U.S., there is an established source for the production of films in a specific area of the public interest.

So far, the post-war field of commercial and industrial sponsorship of documentary has been occupied exclusively by the expansive bulk of Robert Flaherty. The only public relations concept which has at all impressed big business is that exemplified by *Louisiana Story*. The problem seems to be to convince sponsors that anyone, other than Flaherty, can produce a work sufficiently newsworthy to justify the considerable expenditure involved. A less arduous way of providing the nexus between the interests of industry and those of documentary is represented by the highly successful series of short films produced by Flaherty and directed by his brother David, which have been sponsored by the National Sugar Research Foundation (*What's Happened to Sugar*, *The Gift of Green*, etc.).

On the fringes of big-time sponsorship various men and women are making isolated films in the hope that production costs can be returned through the slowly expanding non-theatrical market. *The Quiet One* is the inspiring example here, but it also depended heavily on the theatres. Few other films have succeeded in breaking down the barriers. Production of films about painting and sculpture slowly gets under way to capitalise on the vogue of European art-films. The energies of young men and women who ten years ago would probably have been absorbed into documentary now seem to be for the most part employed in the making of *avant-garde* films after the manner of the French surrealists of the 'twenties. This indicates, to a large degree, that documentary faces a public apathy in direct contradiction to the brighter wartime hopes for a new audience which would not only welcome but demand fact films. That ideological fatigue, of which Siegfried Kracauer writes in connection with fiction films, operates most severely on documentary. Since few people now have real faith in the causes which documentary customarily promoted, it is hardly strange that they are indifferent to the documentaries themselves. This is the background against which American documentary makers have had to work. It is a story of sporadic endeavour, with nearly as many styles and purposes as individuals.

## DOCUMENTARY FILM SINCE 1939

At the time the second edition of this book appeared in 1939, Ralph Steiner and Willard van Dyke were at work on their well-known *The City*, produced for the American Institute of Planners on a Carnegie grant. Briefly and graphically it described the change-over from the American village of a hundred years ago to industrialism and to an urban life hurried, crowded, confused, one step removed from chaos. Unquestionably the metropolitan sequence was the most successful single part, with its dry, ironic documenting of the contradictions of megalopolitanism. Here, as in every 'city' film from *Berlin* on, we were shown the contrast of rich and poor, morning and evening, the fortunate and damned. But here, and it was just about the first time, the contrasts had a point, a point which was made by the brilliant editing. The film came under fire from various quarters, largely because of glossy idealism in its town-planning solution and the inconclusiveness of its end: 'Two ways of living: each of them is real, each of them is possible—the choice is yours.' Actually this was the only statement that could be made, not only because of sponsorship limitation but also because of audience thinking. As an example of the accurate calculation of 'degree of sanction', the film stands as a model. Besides the directors, many other important talents contributed to *The City*. Henwar Rodakiewicz wrote the script from an outline by Pare Lorentz; Lewis Mumford contributed the commentary; Aaron Copland wrote a memorable score, an integral factor in the success of the film; Theodor Lawrence edited; and Oscar Serlin supervised the whole.

After *The City*, Ralph Steiner made the trek to Hollywood, since when he has intermittently worked on short subjects. Willard van Dyke formed Documentary Films Inc., with Herbert Kerkow, and until the outbreak of war made many sponsored films. Of these the most important was *Valley Town* (1940), produced for the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation as a study of technological unemployment during the depression. Van Dyke focused on the plight of one family and used a musical soliloquy composed by Marc Blitzstein to express their desolate humiliation and longing for escape. The aesthetic effects on the audience were as nothing compared with the impact on the sponsors. The vividness with which the director presented the immediate plight of the unfortunates caught in this trap seemed a bitter indictment of the roundabout solutions of classical economics. The Sloan Foundation thus felt moved to finance a 'companion piece' to redress the

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balance, but *Machine: Master or Slave?* was slick and unconvincing. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the soliloquy sequences in *Valley Town* overwhelmed and obscured its general theme, and that the price paid for this technical experiment was the withdrawal of a sponsor on whom so many American documentary hopes were based at that period.

Riding the crest of *The River's* flood-tide success, Pare Lorentz began his duties as chief of the United States Film Service by writing and directing *The Fight for Life* (1940) based on Paul de Kruif's investigation of the hazards of maternity in slum districts. Ten years later it is impossible not to recognise this film as a masterpiece. It is true that the birthing of babies in the Chicago slums was portrayed depressingly, as Congressmen from Illinois vociferously pointed out. It is also true that the work of the two professional actors from Broadway was slick and out of key with the style of the film as a whole, that the 'experimental' use of jazz as a background for the hero's soliloquy was too self-conscious, and that the use of such shopworn symbols as the oxygen bladder was reminiscent of Hollywood hospital films. But all this was of small account beside the fact that Lorentz attacked and solved a problem which documentary makers had been evading for a decade: how to make dramatic and emotional use of real people in their everyday surroundings.

The story-line of *The Fight for Life* consisted of a series of brief, but how intimate, encounters between a young doctor and the poor women whose babies it is his job to deliver. We are drawn painfully into these suffering lives, more deeply still into the meaning of service and what it is to be a doctor. The camera spoke with a finality which silenced argument. It was done simply by following the old Flaherty-Grierson-Rotha precepts about providing natural types with 'the situations which engage their affections'. The structure of this film provided, too, one key to the problem of stating a thesis directly rather than through narration, just as its handling of human beings was the most intimate yet achieved in the sound documentary—a long step forward from such beginnings as *Housing Problems*. With *The Fight for Life*, the personalised social documentary at last emerged.

The very eloquence of the film was instrumental in bringing about the downfall of the U.S. Film Service. When his unit was abolished, Lorentz was in the middle of *Ecce Homo*, a big film about unemployment for which he had already shot hundreds of

thousands of feet. It subsequently became a library source plundered by wartime film-makers, both British and American. Then RKO-Radio invited Lorentz to complete the film in semi-fictional form as *Name, Age, and Occupation*, but after two years in Hollywood it still remained unfinished. During the war Lorentz made excellent cartographic films for the Army Air Forces and began the supervision of an abortive film programme for showing in countries occupied by the U.S. Army. But it would appear that he has not made a complete film for ten years.

Joris Ivens, the Dutchman, joined the U.S. Film Service after a second adventure in documenting the approach of global war. Like *The Spanish Earth*, his Chinese film *The 400,000,000* suffered from restricted finance and the difficulties of film-making under fire. Ivens's next film and his best, aside from *New Earth*, was to be very different. In *Power and the Land*, produced by the U.S. Film Service in 1940, Ivens was charged with the responsibility of convincing American farmers—always a conservative group to reach—of the necessity for rural electrification, and that such electrification was possible through farm co-operatives. To Ivens's lasting credit, he recognised that a dialectical—and controversial—onslaught could not possibly convince the audience for which it was intended. Instead *Power and the Land* was simply a dramatic description of the life of one farm family; we see for ourselves in the drudgery they endure why they need electricity. To explain how rural electrification was to be secured in terms drawn from the farmers' own experience, Ivens inserted a corn-cutting sequence accompanied by a chorus in verse, written by Stephen Benet, which hymned neighbourly co-operation (read co-operative) as a primal American virtue. Though this studied lyricism was out of key, his affectionate approach to people made the picture intensely human. It was undoubtedly for this reason that *Power and the Land* became one of the few American documentaries to achieve wide theatrical distribution.

Despite the success of this picture, Ivens's subsequent path continued to be thorny. Much respected by his fellow-craftsmen, he has had difficulty in obtaining sponsors, being too uncompromising to settle down to the making of facile films. With the war Grierson was the first to seize on Ivens's talent for the Canadian National Film Board, to film a story of the struggle of the Canadian Merchant Marine against Nazi submarines. But

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*Action Stations!*, when it finally emerged in 1943, was barely recognisable as Ivens's work. After an unsuccessful attempt to produce *Know Your Enemy, Japan*, for the Army *Why We Fight* series, Ivens accepted an appointment as Film Commissioner for the Dutch East Indies. He was to go to Australia, set up headquarters and, against the day of liberation, begin the production of a vast programme of educational films which would bring political maturity to the Indonesians in one generation. Here was the ambition of every documentary maker about to be fulfilled! When the project turned out to be very different from what had been promised, Ivens's reaction was characteristic. He publicly broke with the Dutch Government and produced in Australia *Indonesia Calling!* (1946), a brief and violently revolutionary report of the refusal of the Sydney waterfront workers to load arms for the Dutch to use against the embattled Indonesians. The film, and the inspiration which called it into being, are typical of Ivens's career. He is now in Europe, where he has completed *The First Years*, a film on the peoples of Poland, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia.<sup>1</sup>

Although Ivens's intimate approach to his farm family in *Power and the Land* was unique in American documentary, the film was by no means the long step forward represented by *The Fight For Life*. The difference was simple: the latter had direct recorded sound and speech; the former lacked it. *Power and the Land* was simply an example of the silent observational style brought to concert pitch. Much the same comment might be made of Robert Flaherty's film for the U.S. Film Service, *The Land* (1940-41) which, in spite of a brilliant musical score by Richard Arnell and the narration by Flaherty himself, was in all essentials in the tradition of the silent film.

Lorentz had brought Flaherty back to the United States in 1939 to make a film record of the plight of American farmers caused by dust storms, technological advance and the capitalist version of collective farming. No script was prepared; instead Flaherty set forth in his inimitable way, shooting the rural face of his own country for the first time. But by the time shooting was completed in 1941, there was no longer any depression; the war provided a temporary cure. All through the summer and fall of that year, the Agriculture Department's bewildered experts tinkered with the footage, trying to give it a form which would apply to

<sup>1</sup> Vide pp. 294, 297.

changed conditions. The attempt was doomed to failure. Some of Flaherty's greatest shooting was in this film. It told a story no one could mistake. It showed that hundreds of thousands of Americans had become shut out of American life. Despite the desperate efforts of Flaherty and others, the Agriculture Department refused to permit the film to be shown theatrically; only grudgingly was it allowed a 16 mm. distribution.

*The Land* has survived this circumstantial eclipse. Fortunately, Helen van Dongen was called in to edit the final version and she succeeded in preserving the integrity of the film. Looked at today, it remains that epic poem of the land which perceptive observers saw in it at the time of its making. Unlike other Flaherty films in material and structure, it turned constantly from the generalised problems of agriculture to some brief personal story, some chance encounter, which brought into the foreground the consequences of waste and greed. It was a masterstroke for Flaherty to narrate his own film, underscoring the quality of personal experience of a voyage of discovery, which informs the whole. Only so brave an eye as his, it now seems clear, could survey this scene and bring back its unvarnished truth. There are confusions in the theme. Flaherty's personal enthusiasm for mechanical progress complicated the story-line. Its sponsors, interested in immediate problems like technological unemployment, had cast the machine as their villain, but Flaherty's vision of the immense perspectives opened by the application of machinery to farming transferred the argument to another and less parochial level. It is to be hoped that Flaherty will one day find opportunity to make the film on the place of the machine in the modern world, a theme with which he has long been preoccupied.<sup>1</sup>

Shortly after *The Land*, Flaherty was engaged by Frank Capra for his Army film unit. The father of documentary films was assigned to travel round the country and shoot little stories for a news-reel to be shown to troops! Back in New York, Flaherty's prospects were dim. For three years he lived on his Vermont farm in silent isolation. Those who felt so inclined were free to whisper that his day was done. At that time the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey suddenly deemed it politic to embark on a post-war public relations campaign to be spearheaded by a general prestige film. Among the names of film-makers submitted was

<sup>1</sup> Vide p. 81 (footnote).

that of Flaherty. In the teeth of much well-meant advice Standard Oil finally made up its collective mind and sent Flaherty to Louisiana in 1946 to make what emerged as *Louisiana Story*. With him went his wife and co-author Frances H. Flaherty, Helen van Dongen and Richard Leacock as co-producers and, respectively, editor and cameraman. What resulted was a unique attack on the problems raised by Standard Oil's particular propagandist need. Standard Oil's name appeared nowhere in the credits. The film itself concerned oil to the precise extent to which oil is the concern of a small Cajun boy whose native bayous are invaded by drillers seeking a gusher beneath the surface of the watery wilderness. The boy sees the monster derrick come and go, but his relation to it is the same as his relation to his gun, his father's traps, or the denizens of the swamp. It is his life which Flaherty wanted to show us, and it is the beauty of that life which has drawn audiences to the film and gathered millions of dollars worth of publicity.

It is time to put an end to the perennial attempt to force Flaherty into the mould of social criticism, or alternatively to cast him into outer darkness as an irrelevant reactionary. Both alternatives are false because they do not relate to the record. The record shows that Flaherty's role has been that of proclaiming to the world what a marvel the movie-camera can be when it is turned on real life.

The sound track of *Louisiana Story* deserved more comment than it received from professional film-makers. This was Flaherty's first film with sound recorded on location. Flaherty went about it as might have been expected. He listened to the speech of the people, set down on paper (extremely sketchy) dialogue, fed it line by line to his actors, had them say it again and again, re-phrasing it until it came out of their mouths as their own speech. The result, as in the discourse on alligators toward the beginning of the film and the family conversation in Cajun French near its end, was a magical veracity that far surpassed *The Fight For Life*, in which the dialogue still showed traces of the dramatist's pen. Sometimes in *Louisiana Story* the magic falters. This seemed to occur in scenes where dialogue was left to carry the story-line, though Flaherty avoided this as much as possible. He succeeded best when the camera did the narrating and speech fulfilled the function of revealing emotion, character, psychology, coming from the people as their own expression.

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Among other productions, the unit known as Frontier Films made during the late thirties *The White Flood* (1939-40), an excellent straight educational film edited out of footage of Alaskan glaciers shot by Osgood Field, and *United Action* (1939), a record of the daily lives of striking United Automobile Workers in Detroit which got closer to the industrial urban scene than any film achieved by that date. For the three years from 1939 to 1942, Frontier Films was engaged on a major work, based on the report of the Senate Civil Liberties Committee, which had been investigating violations of constitutional liberties throughout the country. Financed from small contributions by thousands of people, *Native Land* was a series of episodes dramatising representative instances of terrorism in a variety of styles, not all of which marched harmoniously together. The beginning sequence, a striking composition of historical and patriotic symbols designed to invoke the Bill of Rights, predicted and matched the similar achievements of the *Why We Fight* series. Succeeding episodes emerged as little dramas acted by a combination of theatre veterans, novice screen actors and natural types (the picture provided Howard da Silva with his first film part) most of whom contributed their services. For all the 'documentary look' of these scenes, for all the vivid imagery of Paul Strand's camerawork, major reliance for the expression of the theme was, however, placed upon the skilled reading of written dialogue. In this respect, *Native Land* was but a half-way house to the point Lorentz had reached in his handling of actors and natural types in *The Fight For Life*. When it appeared in 1942 it passed almost unnoticed, and its fate is one of the characteristic ironies of our time.

*Native Land*, 'conceived and directed' by Paul Strand and Leo Hurwitz, was the last Frontier production; the unit disbanded in 1942. Strand has made no subsequent films, having returned to still photography of which he is a distinguished exponent. Hurwitz produced, wrote and directed *Strange Victory* (1948), a protest against racial and religious discrimination. Among other members of the Frontier group, the poet David Wolff, who wrote the admirable commentary of *Native Land*, made Army movies during the war and subsequently entered the Hollywood studios where, under the name of Ben Maddow, he has written several excellent screenplays of which the most notable were Clarence Brown's *Intruder in the Dust* and John Huston's *The Asphalt Jungle*.

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The modest Sidney Meyers began his career as a symphony orchestra violist. Entering films in 1934, he became film reviewer for *New Theatre Magazine* under the name of 'Robert Stebbins' and, also under that name, helped found Frontier Films in 1936. 'Robert Stebbins' worked on *China Strikes Back* as writer-producer, on *People of the Cumberland*, *White Flood* and *History and Romance of Transportation* as co-director, and on *Native Land* as sound editor. Resuming his own name in 1942, Meyers worked during the war as American editor for British Information Services in New York and then as chief film editor for the O.W.I. When jobs were hard to come by in the post-war world, Sidney Meyers, with Janice Loeb and Helen Leavitt, formed Film Documents, Inc., and for \$20,000 made the feature-length *The Quiet One* on 16 mm. stock. This is one of the few sub-standard films which has succeeded in forcing its way into the theatres on quality alone.<sup>1</sup> It was brought on to the market by two New York distributors of foreign and specialist films, Arthur L. Mayer and Joseph Burstyn, long-time friends of the documentary film, who had been responsible for showing *Open City* in the United States. Through their efforts *The Quiet One* earned back more than its investment and introduced new audiences to the emotional power of which documentary is capable. These facts alone made it the most important post-war American documentary film, with the exception of *Louisiana Story*, if not indeed the most significant since *The City* in 1939. It had another importance, more crucial perhaps; its power and its capacity to travel beyond the usual boundaries of the field came from a deep sincerity and an astonishing command of the movie medium.

Both *The Quiet One* and *Louisiana Story* attacked the old problem of creating character in documentary by using a boy as protagonist; in doing so, they perhaps once again beg the question. But are we to conclude, as Fairbanks suggested so long ago, that children and animals are the only possible 'natural' actors? *The Quiet One* suggested otherwise. The boy's 'step-father' was a character glimpsed only for a few seconds, yet we knew all about him from a monologue which, himself invisible, he delivered in the boy's hearing and in ours. Thus the character had been created by what was essentially an editing device. Also an editing device was the snapshot which startlingly came to life, and which played so eloquent a part in the film. Even the character of the

<sup>1</sup> For cinema showing, it was enlarged to normal 35 mm. gauge.

boy himself, so beautifully 'behaved' by young Donald Thompson, owed its most significant moments to editing—to the association and correlation of shots. This and much else in the film suggested once more that the 'problem of the actor' is not a problem of 'acting' at all, or even of the 'handling' of actors, but of that juxtaposition of sounds and images which is the essence of cinema. *The Quiet One* provided positive evidence that interference with observed reality is necessary; that reality is most subtly patterned in the cutting-room.

Herbert Kline was the militant editor of *New Theatre and Film* when that magazine was the focus of left-wing hopes during the middle 'thirties. The Spanish Civil War involved him deeply and direct film-making was the result: he supervised the photography of *Heart of Spain* and *Return to Life*. In 1938 he produced and directed the document of Munich, *Crisis*, which with its successor *Lights Out in Europe* (1939) was one of the major achievements of U.S. documentary in the 'thirties. Today they seem superficial and biased. What was important was that they were struck off in the heat of the moment; that, like Ivens, Kline gave importance to the documentary camera by focusing it on the decisive events of the period at a moment when many of his colleagues were turning out 'social' films which today seem mere paltering. It states the case best perhaps to say that these films were the first documentaries, apart from Lorentz's Government-sponsored pictures, to reach American theatres. Next, Kline joined forces with John Steinbeck to produce in Mexico from that writer's script the film *Forgotten Village* (1941). Although it used the materials of actuality and attacked a theme of paramount importance, the health education of backward people, it belonged to the nine-lived tradition of 'artistic' film-making. Here Hackenschmied's camera under Kline's direction dwelt on the picturesque rather than on the significant. The village and its people were figures in an aesthetic pattern as much imposed from without as was the pattern Murnau imposed on Polynesia in *Tabu*. Since this well-publicised and widely-seen film, Kline has been active very little. In 1947 he completed *My Father's House*, a dramatisation of Israel's struggle toward nationhood which bore the marks of those technical difficulties which appear to afflict all films made in Palestine. Kline seems to function best as a midwife for other talents; he has helped many young men achieve recognition, but his own unmistakable devotion to the

medium and its mission has yet to find issue in a wholly successful film.

John Ferno (formerly Fernhout), schooled in film-making at an early age by Joris Ivens and Henri Storck, came to America with Ivens in the mid-thirties. His first directorial job in the U.S. was *And So They Live* (1940), reminiscent of his remarkable early film *Easter Island* (1934), and important in its own right. This was one of two film studies (the other was the almost equally excellent *The Children Must Learn* (1940) by Willard Van Dyke) of a degenerate mountain community in the South, commissioned by the Alfred Sloan Foundation. These films recorded the decay of a people plunged in poverty, disease and illiteracy and cut off from the world. Innovations in local educational procedure then in progress were teaching the community how to solve its problems. A second film to record the progress made is due to be produced within the new few years. Apart from this technical and social interest *And So They Live* was a deeply moving and affectionate film.

Ferno has had no subsequent opportunity to reveal the full extent of his abilities. After various war-time activities for the Dutch Government and the National Film Board of Canada, he made for the British Ministry of Information two excellent dramatic records of Holland's liberation, *Broken Dykes* and *The Last Shot* (both 1945). Back in the United States, he directed *Puerto Rico* (1947), which again demonstrated his peculiar sensitivity to human dignity which even the most degraded poverty cannot obliterate. Subsequently Ferno shot much material in Europe for Louis de Rochemont's human geography series, and also worked for the E.C.A. film programme. His *Easter Island* remains one of documentary's masterpieces, but only at moments in *And So They Live* and *The Last Shot* have the limits of his mandate enabled Ferno to reveal fully his individual capacities.

The legendary Julien Bryan was engaged in film activity long before the word documentary was known to the United States. In 1930 he toured Russia with Maurice Hindus, photographing as he went, and throughout the 'thirties he roamed the five continents with his camera. The resulting footage was used as illustrative material for his lectures or was sold to others; for example, the famous *March of Time* subject *Inside Nazi Germany* was based on his footage. In 1939 he accomplished the signal feat of photographing the fall of Warsaw, smuggled out his film and

edited it into the first-hand document *Siege* (1939). Bryan's variegated activities were suddenly given focus when in 1940 he was commissioned by the newly-created Office of the Co-ordinator of Inter-American Affairs to produce a series of twenty two-reel films designed to acquaint U.S. audiences with South America. While his first picture, *Americans All*, gave a general introduction to the peoples and characteristics of Latin America, others like *Bolivia*, *Paraguay*, *Peru* gave an adequate report of the geographic, climatic, industrial and economic conditions prevailing in the several countries. Further films brought the spectator to close quarters with the inhabitants of those countries, as for instance in *Housing in Chile* or *Lima Family*. No such comprehensive report on a whole continent, or even a whole region, has ever been produced elsewhere, with the possible exception of the English and Scottish regional documentaries. The degree of objectivity actually attained is astonishing, and for that reason alone the Bryan programme deserves to be held up to sponsors as an example of what can be achieved by a well-planned, long-range information programme minus direct, propagandist emotional appeals. Not quite as much can be said of Bryan's contribution to the Co-ordinator's other film programme, five two-reelers designed to display life in the United States to the peoples of South America.

Jules V. D. Bucher is the jack-of-all-trades of American documentary and one of its busiest men. By 1940, he had been a producer for the Harmon Foundation, photographer for the child psychology series at Yale University and for the American sequence of Rotha's *New Worlds For Old*, editor of *Men and Dust* and besides countless other activities had photographed the world tours of Julien Bryan. He worked closely with Bryan on the latter's Inter-American series, in particular making a fine directorial job of the document of the Aymara Indians, *High Plain* (1943). In 1945, for the O.W.I. Overseas news-reel, he directed and photographed the brilliant five-minute film *The Window Cleaner*. One of the few examples of humour in American documentary, it was a dry study of a day in the life of a mild, elderly workman calmly attending to his job as he hangs like a fly from the façade of the Empire State Building. In marked contrast with the sententious official tone of too many Government documentaries, *The Window Cleaner* joyously seized upon a detail of the American scene which told its own story without editorialising.

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Irving Lerner was a documentary veteran long before he joined the staff of O.W.I. Overseas Unit, to which he was to contribute so importantly and of which he eventually became production chief. Among countless other activities (including free-lance news-reel and still-photography), he acted as cameraman on Flaherty's *The Land* and edited Van Dykes's *Valley Town* and *The Children Must Learn*. His most notable pre-war achievement was *A Place To Live* (1941), which he directed from a script by Muriel Rukeyser, the poet, for the Philadelphia Housing Association. At the O.W.I. Lerner functioned as a producer who not only gave jobs to many documentary talents (Hackenschmied, Rodakiewicz, Barlow and Meyers among others) but also actively created the conditions under which they could function at their best. He was personally responsible for *Toscanini: Hymn of the Nations*. Intended specifically to please the Italians, its intimate approach to the conductor at work and at leisure delighted everyone.

Most of those attracted to the documentary medium strive to become expert in direction, photography or editing. With the exception of Ben Maddow, only Irving Jacoby has applied himself continuously to the problems of documentary writing, so largely neglected in America and elsewhere. After much experience in making Hollywood shorts and industrial films, and a year in England, he joined Grierson in Canada in 1940 where he made a film of the national sport of hockey, *Hot Ice* (1940), and in 1941, *High Over The Borders*, a beautifully-made film on the facts and mysteries of bird migration in the Western Hemisphere. This most skilfully edited (by John Ferno) natural history film proved more useful to the film programme of the Co-ordinator of Inter-American Affairs than many pictures produced specifically for its purposes. Joining O.W.I. Overseas at the outbreak of the war, Jacoby produced and wrote, among other films, *The Capital Story* (1945) and *The Pale Horseman* (1946). After the O.W.I. Unit disbanded, he joined Ferno, Van Dyke and Rodakiewicz in forming Affiliated Film Producers.

Jacoby has functioned as producer or writer-producer in striking variance from the more traditional documentary mode in which the director or director-cameraman is the chief creative member of the production unit. The results in *The Pale Horseman* were excellent. Compiled from library material, this film was designed to demonstrate the catastrophic global results which

would inevitably follow an abandonment of the U.N.R.R.A. policy of rehabilitating devastated areas. In *The Capital Story* and *Osmosis* (1946) quite a different approach was adopted. The first of these was an O.W.I. short designed to show how the Department of Health in its laboratories traced the source of a harmful ingredient in a process employed in a shipbuilding yard; the second was an experiment of the Motion Picture Association to demonstrate how classroom material can be dramatised and made interesting. Jacoby wrote scripts for both films well in advance of production and treated both subjects as 'detective stories', but introduced so much factitious material as almost to obscure the subject itself.

*Journey Into Medicine* (1947), the biggest of Affiliated Film Producers' productions for the State Department, was produced and written by Jacoby and directed by Van Dyke. It told the straightforward story of the hardships, discouragements and indecisions of a young man who wants to make medicine his career. Interesting in outline, the picture contained meaningless, irrelevant and unnecessary scenes. The verdict 'over-written' must also be applied to Jacoby's commentary for Willard van Dyke's State Department film *The Photographer*, a study of photographic methods which centred around the noted still-photographer Edward Weston. Filmed *con amore* (Van Dyke was a pupil and friend of Weston's), the picture was a lovely impressionist study of the art and personality of a fine craftsman and of his characteristic material—the West Coast of the United States. As such it was a perfect film for State Department purposes; speaking visually and therefore universally in terms everyone understands. Over this came a damburst of words which, from start to finish of the picture, explained the obvious.

As implied earlier, Jacoby's determined attack on writing and planning problems is praiseworthy. Experiment here is long overdue. But 'shooting on paper' can be carried too far; documentary by its nature is an art of observation, and form must, in the last analysis, arise out of what is observed. This is especially evident in cases like *The Photographer*. So far, Jacoby as a writer has functioned best in relation to compiling library material, as in *The Pale Horseman*. It will be interesting to see what emerges from his present project, a series of films on American history based on paintings and statuary now being compiled by Helen Grayson.

## AMERICAN DOCUMENTARY

Miss Grayson is one of the few genuine talents to have risen in the documentary field during or since the war. Prominent as a theatre costume designer for many years, she modestly entered documentary as assistant cutter to John Ferno. Presently she found herself promoted into the position of production manager for the O.W.I. - Army - Burgess Meredith - Garson Kanin - Jean Renoir - Maxwell Anderson film *Salute to France* (1944). It was her unremitting efforts which largely prevented that unlucky production from turning into a more lamentable catastrophe than it eventually did. Immediately thereafter she directed what proved to be one of the best of the O.W.I. documentaries, *The Cummington Story* (1945). This quite remarkable film was based on an actual occurrence in a New England town which invited war refugees into their midst, but only slowly overcame their aversion to the outlanders and accepted them as fellow-townsmen. Miss Grayson induced both the New Englanders and the Europeans to re-enact their own roles in this unusual and painful situation. The result was a film full of drama and sentiment, wholly admirable as an object-lesson against xenophobia and as an intimate portrait of life in rural America. Since the war, Miss Grayson has worked on numerous films in various capacities, claiming as her own a maternity film and a pleasant picture of college life, *Bryn Mawr* (1947). None of these lived up to the promise of her first film.

As a film editor Helen van Dongen is widely known as the saviour of countless films; as a creative figure in her own right, she is only beginning to receive the recognition which her intelligent grasp of the film medium deserves. She edited all of Ivens's films except the most recent, a fruitful collaboration but which tended to obscure Helen van Dongen's own quite distinct talent. That talent came into its own with two war-record films, *Russians at War* (1943), and one of the O.W.I. feature-length news-reels, *News Review No. 2* (1944), of which she was producer as well as editor. These two films could be set against the Capra *Why We Fight* compilations on the one hand, and the Rotha argument films *World of Plenty*, *Land of Promise* and *The World is Rich* on the other, to indicate a third use of compiled material. *Russians at War* was a description of behind-the-lines activities in the vast Russian arena; *News Review No. 2* was an even vaster account of events on all fronts round the world during two years of war. This binding together of human beings in a common

experience was achieved almost without the aid of commentary, which was in both cases negligible. Helen van Dongen's collaboration with Robert Flaherty as editor of *The Land* and as associate-producer and editor of *Louisiana Story*, was an extremely happy and fortunate one for them both. Her contribution was notable.

Besides his own early documentary and *avant-garde* films (*Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* was a well-known example), Henwar Rodakiewicz has collaborated importantly on many memorable documentaries, particularly *The Wave* and *The City*. In 1939 he formed Film Associates with Joseph Krumgold and together they made the rather abortive film on the Southern Negro's educational needs, *One Tenth of a Nation* (1940), *Mr Trull Finds Out* (1941), *Hidden Hunger* (1942) and others. With the exception of the first, none of these films was a documentary in the usual sense. In fact, both Krumgold and Rodakiewicz were at this period loud in their belief that documentary could never reach an audience emotionally, although both subsequently returned to the form when they worked for the O.W.I. during the war, Krumgold making the amusing *Autobiography of a Jeep* (1943). Rodakiewicz directed Irving Jacoby's production *The Capital Story*, referred to earlier, and since the war has made for the State Department a most illuminating and often thrilling film of the spotting of icebergs and their removal from sea-lanes, *Ice Patrol* (1947), and a document of the south-western United States, *Indian Life in New Mexico*, featuring the artist Georgia O'Keefe.

Besides his own impressionist Czech films, Alexander Hackenschmied photographed the three Kline films, *Crisis*, *Lights Out in Europe* and *Forgotten Village*. He received his first independent opportunity at the O.W.I. Overseas Branch, where he directed three of the Branch's outstanding productions. *Valley of the Tennessee* (1944), traversing familiar documentary territory, gave human reference to the vast dams, glittering turbines and contour-ploughed slopes which so many have photographed; *A Better To-morrow* (1945) was an excellent account of what education means to American children as future citizens; and *Library of Congress* (1945) contrived to make even its static subject interesting. These films really fulfilled O.W.I. Overseas mandate to bring alive the American scene. Since the war, Hackenschmied has not been very active. Under the name of Alexander Hammid, he gave technical assistance to several of the

'experimental' productions of his then-wife Maya Deren (*Meses of the Afternoon*, *Ritual in Transfigured Time*, and similar bon-bons) and, resuming his own name, has joined Affiliated Film Producers and made the public relations college film, *Princeton* (1949).

### *Canada*

During the first decade of its existence, the National Film Board of Canada, it has been said, 'has developed from pupil to world teacher'. This remarkable growth is due in the first instance to the foresight of John Grierson, to his inspiring enthusiasm and to the good sense which prompts him, once he has nourished the sprout, to let the tree grow where it list.

Grierson wrote his preface to the second edition of this book in 1939 from Ottawa where he was conferring with Government officers preparatory to setting up the first form of the National Film Board of Canada. The circumstances which led him to accept the headship of the Board are now well known, and the unique character of this Government film project has been described.<sup>1</sup> The National Film Act was signed May 2, 1939; later Stanley Hawes, Stuart Legg, Raymond Spottiswoode and Norman McLaren came from Britain to join Grierson in Canada. Grierson himself accepted the post of Film Commissioner (October, 1939), but by then the whole picture had changed with the outbreak of war. The original conception had been to develop a theatrical-cum-non-theatrical film series, *Canada Carries On*, designed to give Canadians a sense of their importance in the world; to dispel feelings of provincialism and to dramatise strength and promise. Concomitant with this task was the equally important one of transmitting the skill of the imported British craftsmen to young, as yet unknown, Canadians, and thus to found the nucleus of a film unit which could expand into a film industry. As Canada moved into the war, however, it looked as though the whole plan might have to be jettisoned in favour of some more obviously war-related activity. Grierson refused to be jostled into this. Feeling his way, he slowly adapted *Canada Carries On* to the new situation, but he never abandoned its long-term purposes. 'All our Canadian war films', he said at the end of his tenure in Canada, 'were also peace films: there was nothing we founded but was not founded to stay on for peacetime purpose.'

<sup>1</sup> Vide pp. 223, 224, 240, 241.

## DOCUMENTARY FILM SINCE 1939

The first films seemed all too peaceful. Legg's *The Case of Charlie Gordon* (1939) looked backward towards the sociological preoccupations of the British group, although there were signs in it of the coming adaptation of technique to the material and the rhythm of a new continent: the first shot, a close-up of Charlie lounging near an employment agency, might have come from a Cagney film. Soon afterwards the new pattern emerged. The Charlie Gordons and other purely national aspects of Canadian life and the Canadian war effort were confined to the *Canada Carries On* series under the direction of Stanley Hawes, while Grierson and Legg combined to invent a new theatrical series, *The World in Action*, for which they obtained a United Artists release.

Such of Grierson's own efforts as were not absorbed by the job of organising production and distribution (in a country hitherto innocent of either) were poured into *World in Action*. Trying to think his way into the demands of the war on film, he cryptically remarked, 'This isn't a documentary war, it's a news-reel war.' He meant, I think, that the information film, in order to keep pace with events, would have to use more and more news-reel material shot by anonymous cameramen round the world, and that less and less of any film could be specially shot. As a result, the documentary director or director-cameraman, hitherto dominant, would have to take a subsidiary role while the writer and editor emerged as controlling figures. This pattern already existed in the form of the *March of Time*, and Grierson shamelessly stole it. However, the form he devised eventually developed into something far in advance of the *March of Time*, or of any other contemporary informational film medium. New issues of *World in Action* came to be awaited as eagerly in New York as the latest German or Russian film in earlier years.

*Churchill's Island* (1941) and *This is Blitz* (1942) easily illustrated the novelty of the series. Previous films from the Allied countries had tended to deal with isolated aspects of the war effort; even Watt's brilliant *London Can Take It* had given a restricted and purely emotional account of resistance against Nazi bombing. What made *Churchill's Island* seem an altogether new kind of film was that it dealt with the defence plan of Britain as a whole. It and its companions were essentially explanatory and strategic. Whatever their official subject, they focused on the interplay of historic forces which linked the

individual action to the total picture. They gave a sense of competence, of foresight, of ability to anticipate emergencies. They had an intellectual toughness and realism that stood out from the welter of patriotic or moralistic indignation at Nazi horrors. They met the Nazis on their own grounds. They were the first films to tell of Total War.

Global, as well as total, *World in Action* consistently dealt with the conflict on a planetary scale, highlighting the interdependence and interaction of all its phases. Strategy and logistics were key concepts. *Geopolitik* (1942) and *Food—Weapon of Conquest* (1941) put the Nazi master-plan before millions who had never heard of it. *War Clouds in the Pacific* (1941) astonishingly predicted Japan's entry into the war. *Inside Fighting Russia* (1942) and *Inside France* (1944) gave the long-term historic reasons behind the position of these two allies. A score of films related the armed forces to the home-fronts. And, a fact which made *World in Action* unique among films and film series, Grierson and Legg began as early as 1943 to predict and discuss the world beyond war.<sup>1</sup> Their first attempt in this direction was one of those spectacular failures which are often impossible to analyse or explain. *The War for Men's Minds* (1943) bore all the earmarks of a consciously-intended masterpiece. It opposed totalitarian propaganda to democratic hopes in a vast assemblage of news-reel material which rode off in all directions and from which the central theme never emerged except as a truism. It was perhaps a victim of its own ambition.

No amount of lengthening or shortening could make *The War for Men's Minds* other than a botch. But its subject foreshadowed the last and finest phase of the *World in Action*, a series of films which analysed post-war problems and dramatised the concept of the United Nations as a working partnership dedicated to the co-operative solution of such problems. *Global Air Routes* (1944) explained the revolutionary changes which the war had made in communications from the point of view of Haushofer. *Food, Secret of the Peace* (1945) predicted accurately the challenges to statesmanship which would occupy the stage within the next decade. Full of confidence and hope, *Now—The Peace* (1945) and *When Asia Speaks* (1944)—a remarkable film—revealed the outlines of the new birth of freedom which *could* have occurred after

<sup>1</sup> With the exception of *World of Plenty*, which Knight and Rotha scripted in January 1942.

the defeat of the Nazis and the Japanese. A striking feature of these internationalist-minded films was their continual use of crowds, vast seas of human faces which seemed to say that the international machinery then being set up was not only a blueprint but the direct product of the aspirations of ordinary people of every race and nation.<sup>1</sup> These were stirring films, and what they said about popular aspirations was true. If their predictions fell short of fulfilment, that was not their fault; the hopes of the people have been ignored.

For what they had to say, the *World in Action* series stands among the most remarkable films made at any time. In striking contrast to other forms of news-interpretation, they rarely oversimplified. Instead, they assumed more knowledge, intelligence and interest in world affairs than anyone else had been willing to grant the community. The mature, tough-minded realism which they continually featured would have caused consternation in other centres of Government propaganda. But Grierson had the faith to find decent goals in the midst of the grim business of war, and it is of the essence of the man that he could assume people generally wanted that same faith and only waited for it to be kindled to act upon it. With the exception of *World of Plenty* and *The World is Rich*, no other films have ever trusted the world's people to that extent.

In terms of policy and content Grierson's experiment still stands unsurpassed, and does not seem likely to be surpassed in a world where 'information' increasingly does as it is told, means what it is told to mean. In terms of techniques, reservations must be made. Early in the series criticism began to be heard from documentary colleagues throughout the world, a criticism Grierson met with: 'The style comes out of the job. Since it is a question of giving people a pattern of thought and feeling about highly complex and urgent events, we give it as well as we know, with a minimum of dawdling over how some poor darling happens to react to something or other. . . . If our stuff pretends to be certain, it's because people need certainty. If our maps look upside down, it's because it's time people saw things in relativity. If we bang them out one a fortnight and no misses, instead of sitting on our fannies cuddling them to sweet smotheroo, it's because a lot of bravos in Russia and Japan and Germany are

<sup>1</sup> A device suggestively repeated by the United Nations Film Board under Jean Benoit-Lévy.

banging things out too, and we'd maybe better learn how in time. . . . So the long windy openings are out and the cathartic finishes in which a good, brave, tearful, self-congratulatory and useless time has been had by all.' <sup>1</sup>

The anger of this diatribe is partly a reaction to those essentially peacetime films about health and housing and social service which continued to be made, and which recognised the current situation by adding to the commentary, 'Now that we are at war, hospitalisation of unmarried mothers is more important than ever'. Yet it should not be ignored that Grierson's withers were wrung. Brilliantly organised as were such outstanding films as *Now—The Peace* and *Inside France*, there were others in the series—many others—which achieved a dull monotony. Visuals were slapped to the portentous, stentorian commentary in a fashion so meaningless as to leave the spectator neither knowing nor caring what he was looking at; he might as well have been at home listening to a broadcast. Technical criticism of the series rose not alone from the petulance of those who were not equipped to understand Grierson's aims; not alone from the anguish of other film-makers who saw their loved footage cut up and strewn about with no regard to its original purpose. Criticism was justified because too many of the films ignored those fundamental principles of film creation and audience-manipulation which Grierson himself so painstakingly preached in the early 'thirties. Perhaps this can be blamed on war conditions, as Grierson implies. As events moved then, today's bright ideas were tomorrow's canards, and forethought seldom paid off. In any case the fact that Grierson and Legg, together at first and then Legg almost single-handed, turned out the series once a month for four years is in itself a technical and physical feat to be recorded.

With the end of the war, *World in Action* also ended; United Artists was no longer interested in its distribution. There was for the moment an impression of subsidence in Canada. What was forgotten at the time was that Stanley Hawes had not only been carrying on the less spectacular but solidly impressive *Canada Carries On* series but also, in so doing, was training many new technicians. When Hawes went to Australia, and Grierson and Legg to New York, they left behind them a film plant going full blast. Under Ross McLean, who succeeded Grierson as Film Commissioner, the anonymous young took over, with James

<sup>1</sup> *Grierson on Documentary* (Collins, 1946), p. 178 sq.

Beveridge in charge of production.<sup>1</sup> They are still mostly anonymous outside their own country, but in no time their names will be an important part of the documentary story. Their achievements are already comparable with advanced, experienced film work anywhere across the world.

Their work has been carefully planned to meet the needs of post-war Canada. These needs manifest themselves not only through the intimate liaison between the National Film Board and other Government departments but—perhaps even more—through the distribution system which grew up during the war. As head of the Board, Grierson was (for the first time) responsible for both production and distribution, and could observe their interaction at first hand. The system which has developed as a result is a sensitive one. Since producing, distributing and showing films are so nearly one thing in Canada, the Canadian film-makers know almost automatically when they hit the target and when they are wide of the mark. It may be said, with a look in the direction of Britain, that spontaneous demands from groups in the field weigh as much in determining what films shall be made as do the policy needs of the department heads. Or, to strain an aphorism, the Government proposes, the audience disposes. Which is indeed as it should be.

The *Canada Carries On* series achieved remarkable theatrical distribution. Planned to give the Canadian public 'the living sense of what is going on in Canada and in the rest of the world in relation to Canada', it is shown in 500 Canadian theatres and is widely distributed also in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere. Its subjects are as various as *Fashions by Canada* (1946), *Toronto Symphony* (1945), *The Challenge of Housing* (1946), *The Home Town Paper* (1948), *The New North* (1946) and *Inside the Atom* (1948). Being designed for theatrical distribution, *Canada Carries On* has a general spot-news character appropriate to the total national audience at which it is aimed.

The bulk of the N.F.B.'s production, however, is primarily for non-theatrical use and emanates from three separate inspirations. As in Britain many are ordered by departments of the federal and provincial Governments (*Quality Beef* (1947), *Science Helps the*

<sup>1</sup> In 1950, Ross McLean was succeeded by W. Arthur Irwin as Film Commissioner. At the same time, the National Films Act of 1939 was revised and amended. The area of the Board's activities was redefined and to some extent restricted so as to clarify the relationship between its work and that of other agencies both commercial and Governmental.

## CANADIAN DOCUMENTARY

*Farmer* (1948), made for the Department of Agriculture; *Farm Electrification* (1946), for the Manitoba Power Commission; *Workers on the Land* (1946), for the Department of Labour and the *Mental Mechanisms* series for the Mental Health division, Department of National Health and Welfare). Secondly, the film series centring around some area of permanent national interest, initiated by the Film Board itself but customarily produced with the collaboration of national or local bodies (*Work and Wealth* series, *Canadian Artists* series). Lastly, there are special films wholly initiated by the Board to meet particular situations, many of which are produced in collaboration with various agencies of the United Nations. The extent to which this production-distribution set-up, based on close contact with both national and local organisations, is 'penetrating into national life' is indicated by the organisations which sponsor or assist in producing the many films of the Board. Representative examples are: Weekly Newspapers Association, Canadian Library Council, Sculptors' Society, Canadian National Railways, 'Ducks Unlimited'.

No other production agency in the world is quite so naturally set into its social background as is the National Film Board. This is in part due to Grierson's foresight in providing a blueprint which made it possible for the Board to initiate information policies of its own as well as to serve routine Governmental needs. In greater part, it derives from the immense growth of Governmentally assisted non-theatrical distribution during the war, a growth which was not—as in the United States—repressed when peace came. Canadians can see their Government films in their local theatres, in any hall equipped with a projector, or for those who live in the thinly-populated rural areas, a travelling projection unit which brings films where films have never been before. Still another increasingly important reason why films and public are so close to one another in Canada is the character of the production personnel. The film-makers are all young, new to the job, and they come from a wide range of backgrounds both English and French-Canadian imbued with the feeling that what they do is important to the communities from which they come as well as to themselves. They know their subjects.

Their films are by no means parochial. The influence of the Grierson groups and behind it of the whole body of British documentary work is still apparent. *Essouchement* (1945), a popular film in French about the work of a genealogical institute in

Montreal, is simply a new example of the old idea of gaining adherents for documentary through appeal to the special interests of special groups; it is another version of the philatelic film, the popularity of which astounded everyone. More important than such an occasional bright idea, however, is the observable tendency of the Canadian film-makers to search out those national themes which have universal appeal—an extension of the policy deliberately adopted in the last *World in Action* films.

An example of this tendency is the *Mental Mechanisms* series, popular studies of psychiatric problems. *The Feeling of Rejection* (1947), *The Feeling of Hostility* (1948), *Overdependency* (1949) and *The Feeling of Depression* (1950), to name the best, are among the finest of post-war films in technique as well as in content. They seem to owe little to any particular school of film-making but to have borrowed from all that has been learnt about the sound film and then to have made a fresh start. Their vivid impact seems to stem most immediately from editing and, behind that, from writing so careful and foresighted as to leave no visual effect to chance. Yet they give no sense of having been staged. They use non-actors, their material is the ordinary routine of ordinary people. They could be summed up in the title of one of Freud's books—*The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. In them a door, a chair, a flower come to life; the noise of traffic or a poster outside a movie-house pulses with meanings directly connected with the psychic experience of the individual under analysis. In this they resemble the old German 'instinct' films with the addition of sound to carry a part of their complex associations.

A characteristic example of this sound-and-visual imagery occurred in *The Feeling of Hostility*. A neglected little girl comes home from school to find her mother holding a large bridge-party. Unregarded by anyone she wanders through the room while aimless chatter rises from the tables. Most of it is without meaning, only one phrase stands out, over a close-up of the girl: 'Remember, we're vulnerable.' Pabst would have liked that! *The Feeling of Hostility* is the best of these films because it is the least specialised. In *Overdependency* we recognise the unhappy young man as a 'problem' who needs expert help. But the girl in *Hostility* seems on the surface a perfectly adjusted young woman, if not a success story *par excellence*. It is only because we have followed her entire psychic growth that we know, as she stands in her attractive apartment, how empty of emotion her life really is.

One would give a good deal to know something of the impact which these films have on people innocent of psychiatric knowledge. To many it must be as if a curtain had been lifted.

It is impossible, in this connection, to avoid making comparisons between these Canadian psychiatric films and the *avant-garde* experiments which, rather than documentary, have pre-occupied new American film-makers since the war. Many of these experiments, for reasons best known to their makers, centre around psychic experiences—largely neurotic experiences. Their theme is maladjustment. Although the films themselves are intended as experimental investigations of the possibilities of film form, the theme almost invariably gets expressed in a literary way. Masks, costumes, collages of objects, twisted camera angles and distorting lenses are used to conjure up the inner-life of the people involved. Objects are hardly ever seen in their ordinary context, nearly always in the exotic. The tradition invoked here is the tradition of surrealism, with overtones of the expressionism of *Caligari*. Yet it was established so long ago as Pabst's *Secrets of the Soul* (1925) that, for reasons both of technique and psychiatric theory, hallucination is most suggestively rendered in terms of the ordinary (was it, one wonders, Pabst who had the insight, or Abraham and Sachs?).<sup>1</sup> It is the sudden association of emotion with the accidental and the trivial, the seeing of the expected in an unexpected light, which provides a contact between the experience of the spectator and the screen experience which he is asked to understand.<sup>2</sup> The artful romanticism of the 'experimentalist', on the other hand, their heavy dependence on symbols, seems rather to dramatise maladjustment for its own sake. The Canadian psychiatric films, in contrast, are wholly in the tradition of *Secrets of the Soul*. Their material is clinical, their aim didactic and therapeutic, their approach healthy and humanist.

We have entered at this point into a discussion of new documentary problems, problems only hinted at in the 'thirties and during the war years. The *Mental Mechanisms* series, with Sidney Meyers' *The Quiet One*, suggest methods of 'doing without actors' which no one quite anticipated, and which need not be confined to their particular theme. Further experiment is eagerly

<sup>1</sup> See *The Film Till Now* (Vision Press, 1949), p. 363; also S. Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* (Dobson, 1948).

<sup>2</sup> Sennet and Keaton knew this. Hitchcock, with his knives, brandy glasses, flickering signs, knows it too.

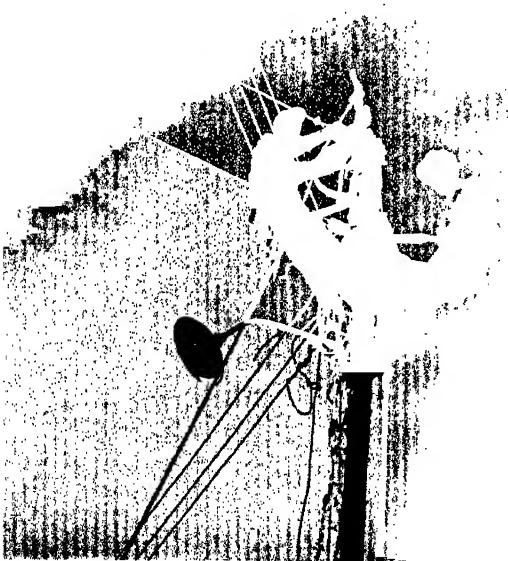
awaited, and may well come from Canada. To date, however, the majority of Canadian films handle people as British documentary has customarily done, in terms of their jobs. *The Connors Case* (1947), a 'special' Film Board production for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, seemed at first sight to owe its style to the M.G.M. *Crime Does Not Pay* series and other capsule melodramas. Yet it is not the terror and suspense of the criminal himself which was high-lighted here, but the sober routine of criminology, the staid, methodical efficiency of the constabulary itself. This is also the approach of the numerous films on housing, farming, conservation, industry and the processes of Government. It is the job which is emphasised, a clue to national character to which we shall return in a moment.

One of the best-known features of National Film Board production is the animation work of the Scotsman Norman McLaren and the Canadians he has trained. It grew out of one of Grierson's earliest insights, the realisation that the films made by his unit for French-speaking Canada must be of equal quality with the rest, but must also be made in terms of the traditions and values of Quebec itself. The first result of this policy was McLaren's charming series *Chants Populaires* (started in 1943), in which French-Canadian folk songs were illustrated by remarkably inexpensive and extremely ingenious and tasteful animation. The old 'Bouncing Ball' idea, almost, but with what a difference! The fact that these films have burst the bounds of the audience for which they were intended and are popular everywhere is sufficient testimony to McLaren's skill. He continues to experiment. His *Fiddle-De-Dee* (1947) carried on the style initiated by Len Lye in England, while *Dots and Loops* (1949) comes to grips with the much-discussed but seldom-tested possibility of drawing directly on the sound track. The importance of his work, aside from his own abilities, lies in its close connection with the interests of the audience which it is his job to reach.

That, indeed, is the strength of all Canadian production. Films in Canada appear to have been built more solidly into national life than anywhere else, even in Britain. This is in part due to the structure of the Film Board itself, in part to what seems to be a national affinity for the documentary medium and purpose. Occasionally there are evidences of influence from across the border, such as *Singing Stars of Tomorrow* (1946) or of attempts



**MONTREAL BY NIGHT: CANADA CARRIES ON SERIES (19.**  
**National Film Board: *directed by* JEAN PALARDY**



**FARM ELECTRIFICATION (Canadian 1946)**  
**National Film Board: *directed by* EVELYN (SPICE) CHERRY**



THE BRIDGE (American 1944)

Documentary Film Productions: *directed by* WILLARD VAN DYKE



THAT ALL MAY LEARN (Mexican 1948)  
United Nations Film Board: *directed by* CARLOS JIMENEZ

to make 'big' films of universal appeal, *Science: Challenge to Cancer* (1950)—a brilliant failure. But most of the Canadian films concentrate on the job of building a democratic community, and of underlining the sense of community interest. Their common characteristic is a sober optimism. The old fleeing wise-crack 'much has been done—much remains to be done' could be applied to their outlook in perfect seriousness. And if that is not—still, in this hysterical period—the essential meaning in the documentary approach, then we have been astray these many years. These films mean to perform a service for their audiences and everything about them is functional. I cannot recall a single instance of technique being used, or misused, for its own sake or for the sake of momentary effect. The old heresies do not seem to take root in the soil of this vast, half-peopled country so industriously intent on providing an abundant life for its citizens. It is interesting to reflect that many of the National Film Board productions have been concerned with integrating the contemporary Eskimo with the Canadian economy, right in the midst of the frozen wastes in which Nanook lived and died. It is more than interesting, it is deeply satisfying, thus to watch them, through Grierson, invoke the great name and tradition of Flaherty. They are entirely worthy of both.

### *Latin America*

The key to the position of the documentary film in Latin America is given in Unesco's report on the informational needs of its members, *Press, Film, Radio* (1950). This is simply a catalogue of lacks. Where there exists a will to use the film for public enlightenment, total absence of adequate sponsorship, equipment and skill makes impossible the development of any concerted programme equivalent to the documentary movements of Europe and North America. But mostly there seems to be lack of will to use films in this way. If there exist, south of the Rio Grande, film-makers with any comprehension of the documentary technique and purpose, these men and their work are unknown in the United States.

Mexico, indeed, pioneered in the field as long ago as 1935 with Paul Strand's *The Wave*, but this notable film had no successors and it is significant that all the technicians connected with it have had to find a place for themselves in other film fields. Aside from

a few health and instructional films, the Mexican Government appears to have abandoned the vein it so fruitfully unearthed with this early film.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, while the Mexican fiction film industry has experienced a great revival and now prosperously furnishes entertainment to all of Spanish-speaking America, there is no sign of interest among its craftsmen in the documentary form, much less in the public purposes to which it could be put. The nearest the Mexicans seem to have come to filming reality is the arty *The Pearl* from Steinbeck's novel (1947), made with one eye cocked on the U.S. theatrical market.

When, at the beginning of the war, the U.S. Co-ordinator of Inter-American Affairs instituted a film programme designed to promote neighbourly relations between the American republics, it was possible to believe that this activity would stimulate the growth of native documentary film production throughout South America, since it was intended to produce many films there for showing to the U.S. public. With few exceptions, however, these films were made by American crews headed by Julien Bryan, Willard van Dyke and others. Contrary to expectations, therefore, the Co-ordinator's programme did little to further native production, nor did it result in the transfer of skill from North to South America. Many of the films made by this office contributed importantly to the education of backward peoples, especially such of Disney's health films as *The Grain that Built a Hemisphere*. But so far as is known the programme had no issue. Documentary production south of the border seems wholly dormant, despite the quickening influence of wartime.

Perhaps this was inevitable. With some brave exceptions, the Governments of Latin America have not been notable for their interest in the progress of public enlightenment. Reaction has regained its seat in the saddle more and more since the war. In such an atmosphere, the documentary idea could hardly be expected to flourish. Alberto Cavalcanti's return to Brazil in

<sup>1</sup> Since the above was written, Luis Buñuel's extraordinary social document of adolescent delinquency in the slums of Mexico City, *Los Olvidados* (1950), has been privately seen. Offering no solution to this deep-rooted world problem, Buñuel's film is a masterpiece of human observation and cinematic skill. Acted by non-professionals and wholly shot in actual surroundings, it is one of the outstanding films in recent years and a great work of art. The Mexican Government's Department of Education collaborated in its production. By nature of its frank, unvarnished portrayal of the brutality, sadism and sex emergence of adolescence the film is certain to receive a very restricted exhibition. The British Censor has intelligently given it an 'X' Certificate—(P. R.)

## LATIN AMERICAN DOCUMENTARY

1950 may provide a growing point, but elsewhere there are few signs of activity. Perhaps, if Unesco's effort to provide equipment and technicians to Latin America is successful, documentary will make a start there. Even so, the complexion of the resulting films will remain a question.

## POSTSCRIPT

*So long as there is means of access to cameras and film, the documentary idea will go on. But it will need also an instinctive artistry, a desire to serve without regard to great rewards, and a direct experience of everyday living by ordinary people. Above all, it needs an honesty of purpose and a faith in the capacity of human beings for tolerance and understanding.*

*All these things it has had in the past from many people in many lands, or else it would not have lived to be the great social influence it is today.*

P. R.

## APPENDIX I

### *The Use of Films by the U.S. Armed Services*<sup>1</sup>

by RICHARD GRIFFITH

Directly after Pearl Harbour, Miss Iris Barry, then Curator of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library in New York, placed the Film Library's resources at the disposal of all Government agencies, civilian and military, which were about to engage in film-making or which had need to consult existing films. These resources were extensively used by the U.S. Army, the Navy, the Office of War Information, the Office of the Co-ordinator of Inter-American Affairs and virtually every other official unit which used or made films. Much material from the Film Library's archives was incorporated into Government productions. Many rare or obscure films were located through its international contacts. As a result of her participation in these activities, Miss Barry was more continuously in touch with all aspects of war-time film-making than any other individual, and thus has a wider knowledge of the subject than even those of us who were engaged in actual film production. She has open-handedly shared her knowledge with me, and much of what I write about the period between 1941 and 1946 consists of a paraphrase of her written or spoken words. Miss Barry is, of course, not responsible for my conclusions, which are my own—although they have been rather decidedly coloured by what I have learnt of her opinions concerning the war-time development of American documentary and its probable future course.

Early in the war, a German general, speaking with more prophetic truth than he knew, declared that the opponent with the best cameras would be the victor. His statement was open to two quite different interpretations: either he implied that motion pictures can be a powerful weapon as an opinion-building, attitude-directing and emotion-stimulating medium; or he was speaking purely as a military man and had already foreseen that

<sup>1</sup> A comparable record of the British use of films from 1939-46 will be found in the Arts Enquiry Report on *The Factual Film* (Oxford University Press, 1947).

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motion pictures were capable, in quite another manner and on a more technical level, of providing a new guide and a new arm to any High Command foresighted enough to utilise them.

A volume of factual film production and distribution on a gigantic scale was undertaken during the war by the U.S. armed services, the War Department performing the greater part of it at a cost estimated at around \$50,000,000 annually, and the Navy the lesser, at a cost unstated. Films were made not only for the fighting men themselves, but also for the exclusive use of the General Staff, for the workers in factories and plants producing all and every kind of material, and—if none of them was actually made for the general public at home and in Allied countries—a very large number of such films was also shown in motion picture theatres from the time a supply of them first became available until the end of 1945, whereafter the film industry no longer opened its screens to Government-made pictures. The 16 mm. distribution circuit created by the Office of War Information similarly showed certain Army and Navy films to other vast audiences.

In addition, the camera had other and more novel functions. Much of the globe and all of Europe was filmed from the air. The military uses of the resulting maps were obvious. The Air Transport Command's Overseas Technical Unit under Lt.-Col. Pare Lorentz performed for three years under a dense veil of secrecy an extensive operation in 'filming the airways of the world'. His unit became the producer of 'briefing films' for pilots, now considered a vital aid by all air services. As a by-product of these operations, the knowledge of world geography has undergone some modification. New facts are known and old data as to contours, flow of rivers, height of passes or peaks, have been rectified.

Quite as new and even more extensive was the coverage by motion pictures of the actual fighting on all fronts, recorded by uniformed cameramen of the various services and constantly rushed back by air to Washington for the High Command, which was thus in a manner hitherto unknown able to study the detail of each operation at first hand, and thereby to determine and analyse a variety of facts, such as the efficiency of weapons, the success or failure of training methods, plans, tactics, as well as of enemy action. Enemy film when captured was also rapidly analysed. This basic combat footage yielded many by-products.

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A secret weekly compilation and digest on film was prepared in news-reel style, with narration, for review and study by the General Staff. Prints were sent to Commanding Officers in all theatres, to Service Commands, and to Technical Schools. These highly restricted films were known as Staff Reports. At the next stage, less secret, more condensed Combat Bulletins were also prepared from the same footage and issued weekly to all theatres of operation to provide the troops with a picture of the war as it was being fought throughout the world. Another use of this basic combat film, after necessary elimination of secret material, was provision of footage taken on the various fronts to the News-reel Pool which served the five American news-reel companies. Thus information from the front reached the public directly and often remarkably quickly through the regular movie theatres. Finally, from combat footage, a complete visual record of the entire war has been assembled to provide a total history of all campaigns on all fronts. This chronology of the war as edited and furnished with appropriate narrative is said to amount to some 500 reels. The total library of uncut war film compiled by the armed forces consists of upwards of 13½ million feet.

Despite this vast assemblage, it should be stated that in the opinion of many film men working during the war on pictures for the armed forces, the Army conspicuously did not actually get down to covering the war adequately *as early as would have been desirable*, especially in contrast with the Nazi achievement in this regard.<sup>1</sup> This was in line with our general 'unpreparedness'. Thus, official cameramen seem to have covered the landing in North Africa only spottily, while the landing in Sicily was better recorded. By Salerno noticeable progress had been made and was sustained; the coverage thereafter was ample. Particularly in the Pacific, Marine and Coastguard cameramen as well as Signal Corps men recorded the successive joint landings in abundant detail and incidentally, with great loss of life among cameramen.

The motion pictures, as well as the basic footage so far referred to, furnished film primarily as record and as factual report: these were information films but, generally, not films that attempted the documentary approach at its full and complex level. There was little or no adventitious comment, no reference to ideas or

<sup>1</sup> The same criticism may be made of the British armed forces, which were desperately slow to make use of the film medium in 1939-42. (P.R.)

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causes, facts or consequences, outside the actual events portrayed. For the most part, the films reached a level of communication which one would like to see attained in current news-reels but no more. Technically, they ranged from the crudest juxtaposition of not very significant shots and bald verbal description, as in a typical Film Communiqué like *Normandy Invasion*, to the well-planned, skilfully executed, singularly eloquent study of a single bombing raid, *Memphis Belle*, made by Col. William Wyler, which (together with the much earlier British picture *Target for Tonight*) unquestionably did more to bring home the realities of aerial combat to the American public than all the tons of news-print which verbally described them. In all such comparisons, of course, it should be borne in mind that quality depended upon conditions. If the available footage was sparse, if the film had to be rushed out in a hurry for some particular reason, the results could never be exemplary.

Incentive films were also planned for and addressed particularly to the civilian public. These, too, were for the most part created out of combat footage. Generally they aimed at keeping the fighting and the myriad problems it entailed before the huge home public; often they were created specifically to overcome lags in the production of needed war material. Addressed primarily to war workers, they called upon them for renewed efforts to furnish what was needed to back up the current or next stage in the general conflict. Typical of the incentive film was *The Enemy Strikes*, made very quickly under the supervision of Col. Emanuel Cohen after the Germans broke through into the Ardennes. Its visuals included a tremendous close-up of a dead soldier's face and anger-provoking captured enemy film of German soldiers smoking with enjoyment cigarettes taken from dead Americans. This ten-minute film was distributed not only to war plants but also, through the film industry's War Activities Committee, to 14,000 United States motion pictures theatres.

Still more impressive and at a more complex level of communication was the Anglo-American *The True Glory* (1945), an emotional as well as a factual resumé of the whole course of the war in Europe from the preparations for the D-day landings in Normandy through to the fall of Berlin and the establishing of contact between the Russian troops and their Western Allies. The narration of this picture was particularly striking, combining as it did both an introductory passage and a later interruption of

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Eisenhower's voice with the voices of actual soldiers who had participated in the various actions shown visually to describe and comment on them. This was contrived with exceptional skill; in particular, the natural, often laconic speech, the understatement of 'real' conversation as here employed suggested how much documentary as a whole might study, improve and vary the texture and delivery of its commentary which, ever since the invention of commentary in the first years of sound, has seemed too much divided from its visuals. Here the dichotomy disappears and speech and action seem to occur in the same time-space continuum. The film also had a superb musical score by the British composer, William Alwyn.

After the fall of Germany, other pictures sought to switch the public attention to the continuance of the contest in the Pacific. Films seen by a very large part of the American populace like *Fury in the Pacific* and *To The Shores of Iwo Jima* gave, on the factual level, as total an idea of modern combat as could be imagined. The unexpected swift cessation of hostilities in the Orient caused an equally unexpected cessation of film production of this kind, at this or any other level, and an equally marked cessation of distribution of the various kinds of war films to the general public.

Combat footage, records, reports and incentive films were far from all that the armed services produced. Training films in large numbers were made by all the services. The use and advantage of film as an adjunct to instruction were stressed both by the Army and Navy: 'films standardise instruction', 'enable every man to have a front seat in Navy experience', 'the same demonstration can be performed repeatedly', 'tests show that students learn up to 35% more in a given time, that facts learned are remembered up to 35% longer.' Both Services emphasise that films 'supplement but do not supplant the instructor', that they will never replace the teacher or actual field training or even the manual or textbook'. The advantages of film teaching were analysed in detail.<sup>1</sup> The findings, briefly, indicate that the great advantages of the film as an instructional medium are its ability to juxtapose events never otherwise seen together, to enlarge or reduce movements and objects too large or small to be seen conveniently, to see through solid objects and inside of mechanisms.

<sup>1</sup> AAF Aviation Psychology Program Research Reports: Motion Picture Testing and Research.

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Especially, it enables students to grasp 'dynamic' ideas and concepts, to view situations from a subjective point of view, and to witness the consequences of correct and incorrect actions. By the use of animated diagrams, films can also usefully personalise abstract ideas in such a manner as to make them understandable and memorable. The general implication is, presumably, that future technical training of all sorts will or should increasingly make use of films and, also, increasingly analyse and discover special contributions to such training.<sup>1</sup>

That the straight 'nuts and bolts' training film, like the juvenile classroom film, exists outside rather than strictly within the documentary film area proper is a common opinion.

The type of film next to be considered differs very considerably both in intention and in technique from the straight training films just referred to. In order to influence thinking, change opinions and affect conduct, the armed Services—the Army in particular—also made a large number of 'documentary' films, classified as Information and Education, with varying degrees of success and in a variety of styles.

The most widely publicised series of Orientation films produced during the war was undoubtedly the U.S. Army's *Why We Fight* series of feature-length pictures, made under the supervision of Col. Frank Capra. They have already been described on page 310 and in *The Film Till Now*, but deserve more detailed account here.<sup>2</sup>

The problem in 1942 was how to turn the youth of a nation, so recently and so predominantly isolationist, into a fighting force not only effectively trained and equipped but armed, too, with the

<sup>1</sup> Film-makers in both the Army and the Navy seem to feel that in producing certain types of training films it is often advisable to provoke audience participation and that to do so greatly helps in getting the teaching home. The Navy was induced to try out audience participation by Bruce Finlay, Director of Visual Education in Los Angeles City Schools, who argued the Secretary of the Navy into it by a persistent stream of letters. An example of its use occurs in the naval training film *Carrier Operations*, made by Gardiner Hart. At a critical moment in the action after the pilot has taken off, the film asks the audience: 'Where is he now?' and the students have to figure out the answer, which of course they determine as the pilot must, from the instrument panel. Later the film asks 'How's his gas?', etc. Audience participation has also been introduced into the Army films on the phonetic alphabet and on map reading.

<sup>2</sup> Four of the series were given wide theatrical and non-theatrical distribution in the United Kingdom, a preface being spoken to the first by Mr Winston Churchill.

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conviction that his country's entry into a world war was not only just but the inevitable answer to serious wrongs. A series of films seemed to offer the best means of so indoctrinating him. It was clearly realised by the minds behind production that no drama or replica of the historical facts and events under consideration would serve the purpose but that only first-hand, factual, actual, ocular evidence would be convincing. The whole series was therefore compiled from existing documentary and news-reel film, drawn from every conceivable source including the enemy, put together after considerable study and with considerable thought, and furnished with a narrative commentary which sometimes described and complemented the visuals but at other times went beyond their subject-matter to add supplementary information or comment.<sup>1</sup> The first three films *Prelude to War*, *The Nazis Strike* and *Divide and Conquer* covered the period 1918 to 1941, documenting the rise of Japanese aggression in the Orient, the growing menace of Hitler in Europe and—above all—focusing attention on changing American foreign policy and public opinion throughout these years. An even more detailed examination and recapitulation of the tremendous changes in American opinions and attitudes, as well as of the conflicting impulses and ideologies that shaped them, was given in the seventh and last film of the series *War Comes to America*. Recent and familiar as were the events, it was nevertheless startling and often dismaying to have them so bleakly and lucidly set freshly forth as in this film; it is difficult even to describe the impact with which, to take an instance or two, seeing scrap metal being shipped to Japan, seeing and hearing President Roosevelt or Lindbergh or Willkie in one of their historic speeches, now struck home. The facts were there in all their calamitous force but with hindsight added; manifest destiny took on new interpretations. It is impossible to deny the persuasiveness of such films but shocking, too, that they could, simply by presenting known facts, have so strong and startling an effect—the measure of the observer's forgetfulness, apathy, or unawareness. The formidable power of the film medium can be seen at its source in the inexorable effect of these examples of the manipulation of slabs of fact, originally seen in another context or none. That these films were vital to the intelligent prosecution of the war there can be no doubt. The claim that they did much to enlighten

<sup>1</sup> Vide footnote on page 310.

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their vast audiences is hardly to be questioned. That they, or such adaptations of them as perspective suggests, should be shown and shown again and that more films like them are desperately needed is as painfully evident. It was Dorothy Thompson who commented that such films would or should eventually displace not only the conventional teaching of history, but also such day-to-day commentary on events as Miss Thompson's own.

Somewhat less impressive, because more limited in scope, were the three remaining films in the series: *The Battle of Britain*, *The Battle of Russia* and *The Battle of China*. *The Battle of Britain* did something (but possibly less than the actual British films shown to the U.S. armed forces) to create an understanding of Britain and the British people's extreme contribution. But tests which were conducted to check the effectiveness of the picture disclosed rather significantly that although the commentary specifically stated that very little in the way of Lend-Lease was being delivered in British ports at the period under review, many audiences gathered another impression—packing cases *were* shown being unloaded in an English port and this image obliterated the verbal statement.

*The Battle of China* was regarded as the least satisfactory of this series. Though notable for its visual record of the vastness of the Chinese land and people, it was forced to omit any reference to the Communist armies, and to balance accounts it omitted more than passing reference to Chiang Kai-shek. The resulting incomplete assessment of the total Chinese situation was also judged to be impolitic: the film was not seen by the general public and was ultimately withdrawn from circulation to the armed forces. Because of such policy difficulties, the film was more than a year and a half in the making, and gives an indication of the kind of problems faced by the Army film-makers during the last phases of the war.

Among the many film operations undertaken by the Army one of the most instructive was the production of a bi-weekly, twenty-minute news-reel exclusively for the armed forces. The suggestion that it would be advisable to have a special news-reel for the fighting men was first put forward by Frank Capra early in 1942. Later in the year a Hollywood script-writer, Leonard Spigelgass, was named to undertake the production of such a news-reel. Men associated with Spigelgass on this project were Henry M. Berman, Hollywood film editor, and the 20th Century-

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Fox script-writer Don Etlinger, the latter as chief script editor for all the news-reels. The *Army-Navy Screen Magazine* began to appear regularly in the spring of 1943.

The *Screen Magazine* had certain rather rigid military directives to serve. It was also conceived from the start as being a medium which could and should respond to the actual desires and interests of its soldier audience rather more flexibly than was possible with other forms of Army information film. Therein lies its significance. Flexible response to audience demand was the stated purpose—but there were certain reservations. Military minds knew just what they wanted said through this 'responsive' medium; Hollywood technicians were assured by box-office experience that theirs were the techniques bound to please. Both found that they had something to learn. More and more the *Screen Magazine* turned into a mirror of the soldier mind (thanks to Spigelgass's courageous fight for its independence of customary restrictions). Less and less did it display any of the notions of the Pentagon or of Culver City. The results, I think, are worthy of study by all who use the camera and microphone to try to influence the attitude of millions whom they do not know.

The first issues had of necessity to be made out of the (Hollywood) experience of the production unit: in retrospect they seemed to the crew either too pompous or too corny. The magazine did not really hit the mark of active audience response until the twentieth issue. By this time the crew were getting a pretty good idea, both by reporters in the field and by fan mail which began to come in, of what their effects had been. A new feature was introduced under the title 'By Request': this did respond to requests sent in from the field, and in return provoked more requests. As examples, a soldier in the Aleutians begged for a glimpse of his home town; men in the tropics asked for shots of Chicago in a blizzard: one private sent in the words for a song he had composed, asking without much hope that music be put to it and 'get some dame to sing it. I'd faint!' All these and many similar pleas were replied to briefly: in introducing the words-with-music sent in by the last-mentioned, the commentator remarks, 'Here you are, soldier, go ahead and faint'. Such incidents go far to demonstrate how completely and how intimately this film form did become the 'soldiers' own'. But I do not know that it has been remarked elsewhere how clearly the sum-total of the requests indicates how closely the

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men were tied to home in the narrowest sense, how very restricted their interests were to the known, familiar and domestic, how seldom they evinced an interest in anything outside their own personal experience and background. Appealing as this may be, it also suggests how little the men had actually been educated or oriented, whether in the Army or before, away from apron strings or the backyard of isolationism and how little they care or know or are told about the immense remainder of the universe. One can only conclude that it may indeed be One World, but that to the average man it continues to be the other old one world, which is bounded by the stretch of his own Main Street.

Another instructive discovery made by this news-reel unit was that the old Voice-of-God commentary was unacceptable to troops under discipline. Commentary had to be spoken in the vernacular and uttered in the voice of a clearly identifiable man, a man whom the men themselves could accept and recognise as an authority. For example, when the problem arose of convincing the frankly sceptical soldiers that there had indeed been enemy plans and measures for creating internal strife, for stirring up sedition, for planning wholesale espionage and sabotage within the United States, this incredulity was largely overcome by having the issue that dealt with this topic (under the title of *The Battle of the United States*) fortified by the physical presence on the screen, and by the direct voice in commentary, of J. Edgar Hoover himself. Him the men would believe, whereas an anonymous commentator's narration would have been taken by them as so much more hooey about so much more propaganda. (Incidentally, this same topic afterwards furnished the plot of the first highly successful semi-documentary Hollywood feature film, *The House on 92nd Street*.)<sup>1</sup>

Equally suggestive in the realistic production of motion pictures intended for adult education is the fact that the *Army-Navy Screen Magazine* consciously adopted a tough and practical, not an idealistic and humanitarian, attitude to a number of radical, controversial or knotty topics. In treating with such subjects as Lend-Lease, the dangers of inflation, the American Field Service, Japanese-American soldiers or refugees, self-interest was stressed much more than any other argument. This was done

<sup>1</sup> Produced by Louis de Rochemont, directed by Henry Hathaway for 20th Century Fox, 1946.

deliberately because there was proof that it worked, punched the intended message home, while the brotherhood-of-man approach did not. The same attitude was adopted in an interesting O.W.I. Overseas film on the work of U.N.R.R.A., *The Pale Horseman*, referred to elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

The resulting experiences of the *Screen Magazine* with its vast soldier audience (the biggest guinea-pig on which any form of documentary has ever had a chance to experiment) suggest in fact that man-in-the-mass will accept concepts only on his own terms and in his own conception of his interests—a conclusion which casts a sobering light on many information-film theories both past and present. There is, however, another side of the coin. The makers of *Screen Magazine* discovered that they could try too hard to please the soldiers. Humour, particularly, was often found to be quite the wrong sugar-coating for unpalatable facts. Once the comedian Bert Lahr spoke the comic narration to a film giving vital information about radio-controlled planes. This, subsequent tests demonstrated, the men violently detested. They wanted a topic serious to them to be presented seriously.

Among the many hundreds of films made by the armed services, the following may serve to give some idea of the variety as well as the objectives of this tremendous mass of production.

*Baptism of Fire*<sup>2</sup> was shown to every soldier before he went into combat with the intention of preparing him emotionally for the experience and suggesting that the feeling of fear, though inevitable, need not prevent his being an efficient fighter. Made in the style of a Hollywood serial film, it seemed purposely to exaggerate and both to over-dramatise and over-simplify its representation of the more spectacular and gruesome elements of combat. Similar to it was *Resisting Enemy Interrogation*, a feature-length film which also showed the influence of Hollywood; both bore a resemblance to the British film *Kill or be Killed*.

Quite a different purpose inspired *The Negro Soldier*, a rather tame picture made in an effort to overcome contempt for coloured soldiers. Filmed with passion by Maj. Stuart Heisler, it was reduced to a somewhat childish level because it could not refer to the position of the civilian negro in U.S. life. More interesting was *Twenty-Seven Soldiers*, which showed that in one sector on the Italian front Allied soldiers of 27 nationalities were

<sup>1</sup> Vide p. 327.

<sup>2</sup> Not to be confused with the Nazi film of the same title.

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amiably and effectively working together in spite of the difference of race, colour, creed, habits, etc. The film was especially impressive to soldiers because it was based upon a real happening as much as upon democratic 'theorising'.

*Your Job in Germany* had an opposite message. Made before the Normandy landings to indoctrinate men about to invade Germany, it said and reiterated, 'Do not trust these people, no matter how charming and clean and blond and music-loving they seem, no matter how prettily and innocently they execute peasant dances in the village square. Remember that these are the same people who, three times within the past century, precipitated bloody war; remember that they were solidly behind Hitler; do not trust them or fraternise with them.' The message was well conveyed by its visual even more than its verbal content, especially by its inclusion of concentration-camp footage. The film was withdrawn when the non-fraternisation rule was removed. One can only surmise as to whether the soldiers believed what it said.

The same comment might be made on *Know Your Ally, Britain*, written by Major Eric Knight and prepared to shape the behaviour of American troops quartered in the British Isles and to dispel at least some of their ignorance and prejudice. Its account and explanation of Britain's political role during the appeasement era, its description of certain British characteristics which differ from American ones, were sensibly presented though perhaps aimed at an audience better informed than the average G.I. It formed an interesting pendant to the British-made film, *United States*, written and directed by Major Eric Ambler to explain American *mores* to British soldiers. While both were useful films, the strongest impression they leave behind them is how very great are the international misunderstandings which they attempt to dispel, how small a drop in the bucket of prejudice they constitute, and how very badly more films of this type are needed. A third Army film in this general group was *These Are the Philippines*, made by Major Richard Maibaum at General MacArthur's request to acquaint the troops with the islands they were about to re-take. The basic idea, not expressed but implicit, was that this is not another New Guinea, these people are not savages, but expect to be treated as equals and allies.

An exceptionally striking film—one of the best in fact—*Let There Be Light*, directed by John Huston, concerned itself with

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the treatment of soldiers suffering from war-induced neuroses. Here the camera like an invisible spectator recorded the facial expressions, uncontrollable weeping and tics, and the voices of half-a-dozen men being given their initial interviews by psychiatrists: it followed treatments by hypnosis, by narco-synthesis, and continued through to the final group-therapy and group discussions in which the men participate. The purpose of this film was to convince the general public and potential employers of such men that they are not 'nuts' or dangerous. But its implications are deep. One was the intolerable strain that combat puts on men; one was that the amnesia, speechlessness, loss of the use of limbs and other symptoms which they show stem often not only from the battle experience itself but from far deeper emotional conflicts dating back to childhood experiences. Perhaps most striking of all is the tacit implication that everyone needs (and an ideal society would provide) security and that this would include readily available psychiatric treatment for everyone. The film has never been released for showing except to psychiatrists, though much pressure has been brought for permission to release it publicly. This has not been given, reasons being that the War Department (1) is afraid that the men portrayed might bring actions for damage and that the 'performance releases' they all signed could be held invalid on the ground that they were mentally unstable at the time of giving them; (2) is afraid of pressure from families whose soldier-relatives have not yet been cured, especially as there is a great shortage of psychiatrists to carry on this work; (3) never intended a film of this sort to be made anyway, that Huston 'pulled a fast one'.

The third alternative may well have some substance. Huston, brilliant Hollywood director, more than any other Hollywood personality really 'went documentary' during the time he was in the Army.<sup>1</sup> Though his first picture, *Report from the Aleutians* (1943) was not particularly meaningful or skilful, it was he who afterwards (and after a long indoctrination in documentary

<sup>1</sup> Huston worked on the scripts of *Juarez* (1939), *Dr Ehrlich's Magic Bullet* (1940), *High Sierra* (1941) and directed notably *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1947), *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950) and the remarkable *Red Badge of Courage* (1951) from Stephen Crane's book of the American Civil War. Huston's experiences learnt from *Let There be Light* are clearly reflected in *Red Badge of Courage*, which was severely shortened by its producers, M-G-M, and given a very restricted theatre release. It received almost unanimous praise from the British press in November, 1951.

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films) made the most poignant picture of the war, *The Battle of San Pietro* (1944). This, as so few of the war-record films did, went far beyond the physical realities of battle. Among other things, it tended to indicate the very great difference between military strategy and its necessities and the human courage, the fearful expendability, of the men who really fight. It reiterated the great number of men killed to take one small objective and, as the Signal Corps cameramen were right on top of the fighting, the deaths of these men seen so intimately seemed particularly poignant and terrible. After the battle, the dead are shown being put into sacks and buried in a large cemetery—this, of course, went beyond anything of the kind that had been put on the screen before, even in the latter days of the war.

The commentary remarked that 'the lives of these men were valuable—valuable to their country, to their loved ones, *and to the men themselves*'—a suggestion almost unprecedented in a culture which habitually viewed war casualties in terms of their damage to the feelings of female relatives. As the fighting ceased and moved on, and the inhabitants of the little town of San Pietro began to come out of holes in the ground, the commentary also remarked that the object of the fighting had not been the liberation of these people. The faces of the children as they came forward were particularly horrifying, stricken, though—in what was a peculiarly false note in this otherwise remarkable film—the commentary declared (to the accompaniment also of Hollywood-style choral music) that 'children soon forget'.

Finished in 1944, *The Battle of San Pietro* did not appear until well into 1945—and even so much of the original form of the film was cut. Colonels in the Pentagon fiddled with the material, trying to balance its undeniable reality against its equally undeniable unorthodoxy. Superficially and incorrectly called a 'pacifist' film, it actually was a double-barrelled critique of the 'higher brass', and of the meeching sentiment which pervaded most war propaganda from whatever source. The fate of *The Battle of San Pietro* made evident again that a film that really tried to say something, that called upon the full range and expressive power of documentary was apt (as in peace days) to create opposition and face difficulties in obtaining exhibition.

The end of the war caused not only film production of this type but also distribution to stop. Such films as the Air Force's *Thunderbolt* (a terrifying account of aerial warfare in Italy) and

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the Navy's *It's In Your Power* (which attempted to tell men about to be demobilised what democracy really is and why it is so important for them to vote) among many other films of note have apparently been seen by no audiences. For five years some distributors, both theatrical and non-theatrical, have tried through the Library of Congress and other agencies to obtain access to the great wealth of films suitable for general circulation or special uses which were created by the war. They all remain invisible.

The productions of the U.S. Army and Navy, remarkable and important though they were, do not really fall into the historic reading of documentary. The disparity between this statement and the general impression that American documentary films not only came into their own during the war but 'came to stay' arises from a general misconception of the vast bulk of war-time production, of its purpose and character. It established that films can teach and inform, but it is not clearly realised, perhaps, that the level of such teaching and information was for the most part restricted to technical instruction as in the training films, or to purely factual information about the war as in the Incentive films, or even in the mass of the so-called 'documentary' war films. It was exceptional for any moral, social or economic issues to be referred to in them. They extended the individual's knowledge of the world conflict but hardly ever called upon him to think, draw conclusions, or pass judgments. The main objective of the documentary film proper until World War II was primarily to extend experience, but also emphatically and purposefully to suggest conclusions, stimulate ideas, change or affirm attitudes. They were, if you wish, propaganda for progressive ideas and actions. Except for the orientation films of the *Why We Fight* series, that was not the case with most of the war-time factual films.

Thus, while the war use of such films established the capacity of the medium as a teaching aid and vastly extended its use, it did not on the whole further or even notably continue documentary's main function of shaping or spreading constructive opinions and ideas for the good of mankind.

## APPENDIX II

### *A List of One Hundred Important Documentary Films (being a personal selection by the three authors)*

#### AERO-ENGINE

1933-4 (silent)

British

*Production:* Empire Marketing Board Film Unit.

*Producer:* John Grierson.

*Direction, Script and Editing:* Arthur Elton.

*Photography:* George Noble.

#### BATAILLE DU RAIL, LA

1944-5 (sound)

French

*Production:* Coopérative Générale du Cinéma Français.

*Direction and Script:* René Clement.

*Dialogue:* Colette Audry.

*Photography:* Alekan.

*Music:* Yves Baudrier.

#### BATTLE FOR THE UKRAINE, THE

1942-3 (sound)

Soviet

*Production:* Central Newsreel Studios.

*Producer:* Alexander Dovjenko.

*Direction:* Julia Solntseva, L. Bodik.

#### BATTLE OF RUSSIA, THE

1943 (sound)

American

*Production:* Orientation Branch of the U.S. War Department.

*Direction:* Lt.-Col. Anatole Litvak.

*Script:* Lt.-Col. Anatole Litvak, Capt. Anthony Veiller, Cpl. Robert Heller.

*Narration:* Walter Huston, Capt. Anthony Veiller.

*Editing:* Major William Hornbeck.

*Library Research:* Sgt. Richard Griffith.

*Music:* Dmitri Tiomkin.

(One of the *Why We Fight* series)

APPENDIX II  
BATTLE OF SAN PIETRO, THE

1945 (sound) American  
*Production:* Army Pictorial Service.  
*Direction and Script:* Major John Huston.  
*Photography:* Capt. Jules Buck and U.S. Signal Corps cameramen.

B.B.C.: THE VOICE OF BRITAIN

1934-5 (sound) British  
*Production:* G.P.O. Film Unit for the British Broadcasting Corporation.  
*Producers:* John Grierson, Cavalcanti.  
*Direction and Script:* Stuart Legg.  
*Photography:* George Noble, J. D. Davidson, W. Shenton.

BERLIN  
(*Symphony of a City*)

1927 (silent) German  
*Production:* Fox-Europa.  
*Supervision:* Karl Freund.  
*Direction:* Walther Ruttmann.  
*Source:* Carl Mayer.  
*Photography:* Reimar Kuntze, Robert Baberski, Laszlo Schäffer.  
*Musical Score:* Edmund Meisel.

BORINAGE, THE

1933 (sound) Belgian  
*Production:* E.P.I.  
*Direction, Script and Photography:* Joris Ivens, Henri Storck.  
*Editing:* Helen van Dongen.  
*Music:* Hans Hauska.

CHILDREN OF THE CITY

1944 (sound) British  
*Production:* Paul Rotha Productions for the Scottish Office.  
*Producer:* Paul Rotha.  
*Direction, Script and Editing:* Budge Cooper.  
*Photography:* Wolfgang Suschitzky.  
*Narration:* Alastair Dunnnett.

APPENDIX II  
CHILDREN OF THE EARTH  
(*Dharti ke Lal*)

1945 (sound) Indian  
*Production:* Indian People's Theatre Association.  
*Direction and Script:* K. A. Abbas.

CHILDREN ON TRIAL

1946 (sound) British  
*Production:* Crown Film Unit.  
*Producer:* Basil Wright.  
*Direction:* Jack Lee.  
*Script:* Jack Lee, Norah Dawson.  
*Photography:* H. E. Fowle.  
*Design:* Edward Carrick.  
*Editing:* Alan Osbiston, Humphrey Swingler.  
*Music:* Clifton Parker.

CITY, THE

1939 (sound) American  
*Production:* Civic Films, Inc.  
*Associate Producer:* Henwar Rodakiewicz.  
*Direction and Photography:* Ralph Steiner, Willard van Dyke.  
*Supervision:* Oscar Serlin.  
*Outline Script:* Pare Lorentz.  
*Editing:* Theodor Lawrence.  
*Music:* Aaron Copland.  
*Based on:* Lewis Mumford's *The Culture of Cities*.

COAL CRISIS

1947 (sound) British  
*Production:* *This Modern Age* (Rank Organisation).  
*Producer:* Edgar Anstey.  
*Literary Editor:* G. Ivan Smith.  
*Direction:* John Monck.  
*Editing:* Bert Eggleston.  
*Producer of This Modern Age series:* Sergei Nolbandov,

COAL FACE

1936 (sound) British  
*Production:* Empo.

## APPENDIX II

*Producer:* John Grierson.  
*Direction and Script:* Alberto Cavalcanti.  
*Sound:* Alberto Cavalcanti.  
*Editing:* William Coldstream.  
*Music:* Benjamin Britten.  
*Verse:* W. H. Auden.

### COASTAL COMMAND

1942 (sound) British  
*Production:* Crown Film Unit.  
*Producer:* Ian Dalrymple.  
*Direction and Script:* J. B. Holmes.  
*Second Unit Directors:* Ralph Elton, Jack Lee, R. Q. McNaughton.  
*Photography:* Jonah Jones, F. Gamage.  
*Design:* Edward Carrick.  
*Editing:* Michael Gordon.  
*Music:* Vaughan Williams.

### CONTACT

1932-3 (sound) British  
*Production:* British Instructional Films for Imperial Airways Ltd.,  
and Shell-Mex and B.P. Ltd.  
*Direction, Script and Editing:* Paul Rotha.  
*Photography:* Jack Parker, George Pocknall, Frank Goodliffe,  
Horace Wheddon.  
*Music:* Clarence Raybould.

### CORN IS IN DANGER, THE (*Kornet er i Fare*)

1944 (sound) Danish  
*Production:* Nordisk Films Kompagni.  
*Direction and Script:* Hagen Hasselbalch.  
*Photography:* Verner Jensen.  
*Music:* Kai Rosenberg.

### CRISIS

1938 (sound) American  
*Production:* Arthur L. Mayer.  
*Direction and Script:* Herbert Kline.  
*Associate Direction:* Hans Burger.

## APPENDIX II

*Photography:* Alexander Hackenschmied.  
*Commentary:* Vincent Sheean.  
*Narration:* Leif Erickson.  
*Music:* H. W. Susskind, Jaroslav Harvan.

### CUMMINGTON STORY, THE

1945 (sound) American  
*Production:* Office of War Information.  
*Producer:* Irving Lerner.  
*Direction and Script:* Helen Grayson, Larry Madison.  
*Music:* Aaron Copland.

### CYPRUS IS AN ISLAND

1946 (sound) British  
*Production:* Greenpark Productions for the Ministry of Information.  
*Direction:* Ralph Keene.  
*Script:* Laurie Lee.  
*Photography:* George Still.  
*Editing:* Peter Scott.

### DARK RAPTURE

1938 (sound) Belgian  
*Production, Direction and Photography:* Armand Denis.  
*Associate Producer:* LeRoy G. Phelps.

### DAWN OF IRAN

1937-8 (sound) British  
*Production:* Strand Films for Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.  
*Producer:* Arthur Elton.  
*Direction, Photography and Editing:* John Taylor.  
*Music:* Walter Leigh.

### DAYBREAK IN UDI

1948 (sound) British  
*Production:* Crown Film Unit.  
*In Charge of Production:* John Taylor.  
*Producer:* Max Anderson.  
*Direction:* Terry Bishop.  
*Assistant Direction:* Eric Fullilove.

## APPENDIX II

*Script:* Montagu Slater.  
*Photography:* F. Gamage.  
*Editing:* Terry Trench.  
*Music:* William Alwyn.

### DESERT VICTORY

1943 (sound) British  
*Production:* Army Film and Photographic Unit and the Royal Air  
Force Film Production Unit.  
*Producer:* Major David MacDonald.  
*Direction and Supervising Editor:* Capt. Roy Boulting.  
*Assistant Direction:* Lt. Patrick M. Jenkins.  
*Photography:* Battle cameramen of the Army Film Unit attached  
to the 8th Army.  
*Commentary:* J. L. Hodson.  
*Editing:* Sgt. Richard Best, Sgt. Frank Clarke.  
*Music:* William Alwyn.

### DIARY FOR TIMOTHY, A

1944-5 (sound) British  
*Production:* Crown Film Unit.  
*Producer:* Basil Wright.  
*Direction and Script:* Humphrey Jennings.  
*Photography:* F. Gamage.  
*Commentary:* E. M. Forster.  
*Narration:* Michael Redgrave.  
*Editing:* Alan Osbiston, Jenny Hutt.  
*Music:* Richard Addinsell.

### DIVIDE AND CONQUER

1943 (sound) American  
*Production:* Orientation Branch of the U.S. War Department.  
*Direction:* Lt.-Col. Frank Capra, Major Anatole Litvak.  
*Script:* Capt. Anthony Veiller, Cpl. Robert Heller.  
*Narration:* Walter Huston, Capt. Anthony Veiller.  
*Editing:* Capt. William Hornbeck.  
*Library Research:* Sgt. Richard Griffith.  
*Music:* Dmitri Tiomkin.  
(One of the *Why We Fight* series.)

## APPENDIX II

### DRIFTERS

1929 (silent) British  
*Production:* Empire Marketing Board Film Unit.  
*Direction, Script and Editing:* John Grierson.  
*Photography:* Basil Emmott.

### EASTER ISLAND

1935 (sound) Belgian  
*Production:* E.P.I.  
*Direction, Script and Photography:* John Fernhout.  
*Editing:* Henri Storck.  
*Music:* Maurice Jaubert.

### ENOUGH TO EAT

1936 (sound) British  
*Production:* The Gas, Light & Coke Co., London.  
*Direction, Script and Editing:* Edgar Anstey.  
*Assistant Direction:* Frank Sainsbury.  
*Photography:* Walter Blakeley, Arthur Fisher.  
*Narration:* Dr Julian Huxley.

### FACE OF BRITAIN, THE

1934-5 (sound) British  
*Production:* G.B. Instructional Ltd.  
*Direction, Script and Editing:* Paul Rotha.  
*Photography:* George Pocknall, Frank Bundy.

### FARREBIQUE

1945-6 (sound) French  
*Production:* L'Ecran Français and Les Films Etienne Lallier.  
*Producer:* Jacqueline Jacoupy.  
*Direction and Script:* Georges Rouquier.  
*Photography:* André A. Danton.  
*Scientific Photography:* Daniel Saviade.  
*Music:* Henry Sauguet.  
*From a story by:* Claude Blanchard.

### FEELING OF REJECTION, THE

1947 (sound) Canadian.  
*Production:* National Film Board of Canada.

## APPENDIX II

*Direction:* R. Anderson.  
*Script:* Dr Bruce Ruddick.  
*Editing:* V. Jobin.  
*Music:* R. Fleming.

### FIGHT FOR LIFE, THE

1941 (sound)  
*Production:* U.S. Government Film Service.  
*Direction, Script and Editing:* Pare Lorentz.  
*Photography:* Floyd Crosby.  
*Music:* Louis Gruenberg.  
*Based on a book by:* Paul de Kruif.

American

### FIGHTING LADY, THE

1944 (sound)  
*Production:* U.S. Navy.  
*Supervision and Editing:* Louis de Rochemont.  
*Photography:* U.S. Navy cameramen.

American

### FILM OF DENMARK, THE (*Danmarksfilmen*)

1935 (sound)  
*Production:* Danish Foreign Office.  
*Direction and Script:* Poul Henningsen.  
*Photography:* Poul Eibye.  
*Music:* Bernhard Christensen.

Danish

### FILM OF HOLLAND, THE

1951 (sound)  
*Production:* Piet van Mooock for N.V. Forum.  
*Direction, Script and Photography:* Bert Haanstra.  
*Music:* Max Vredenburg.

Dutch

### FIRES WERE STARTED

1943 (sound)  
*Production:* Crown Film Unit.  
*Producer:* Ian Dalrymple.  
*Direction and Script:* Humphrey Jennings.  
*Photography:* Cyril Pennington-Richards.  
*Design:* Edward Carrick.

British

## APPENDIX II

*Editing:* Stewart McAllister.

*Music:* William Alwyn.

### FORWARD A CENTURY

1951 (sound)

British

*Production:* Basic Films for Petroleum Films Bureau

*Producer:* Stuart Legg.

*Direction and Script:* J. B. Napier-Bell.

*Photography:* Larry Pizer, Victor Proctor, Walter Lassally.

*Editing:* Derek York.

*Music:* Edward Williams.

### FOUR HUNDRED MILLION, THE

1938-9 (sound)

American

*Production:* Contemporary Historians, Inc.

*Direction and Script:* Joris Ivens.

*Photography:* John Ferno, Robert Capa.

*Editing:* Helen van Dongen.

*Music:* Hanns Eisler.

*Commentary:* Dudley Nichols.

### GENERAL LINE, THE

(*The Old and the New*)

1926-9 (silent)

Soviet

*Production:* Sovkino.

*Direction, Script and Editing:* S. M. Eisenstein, G. Alexandrov.

*Assistant Direction:* M. Shtraukh, M. Gomorov.

*Photography:* Eduard Tissé.

*Design:* A. Burov, V. Kovrigin.

*With:* Marfa Lapkina.

### GRASS

1925 (silent)

American

*Production:* Famous Players (Paramount)

*Script, Direction and Photography:* Meriam C. Cooper,  
Ernest B. Schoedsack.

*Editing:* June Mathis.

### HARVEST SHALL COME, THE

1941-2 (sound)

British

*Production:* Realist Film Unit for Imperial Chemical Industries  
Ltd.

## APPENDIX II

*Producer:* Basil Wright.

*Direction and Editing:* Max Anderson.

*Assistant Direction:* Bert Pearl.

*Script and Dialogue:* H. W. Freeman.

*Photography:* A. E. Jeakins.

*Music:* William Alwyn.

*Narration:* Edmund Willard, Bruce Belfrage.

*With:* John Slater, Eileen Beldon, Richard George, Victor Woolf,  
Ernest Borrow.

### HOUSING PROBLEMS

1935 (sound)

British

*Production:* British Commercial Gas Association, London.

*Direction and Script:* Edgar Anstey, Arthur Elton.

*Photography:* John Taylor.

*Assistant:* R. I. Grierson.

### INDUSTRIAL BRITAIN

1933 (sound)

British

*Production:* Empire Marketing Board Film Unit.

*Producer:* John Grierson.

*Direction and Photography:* Robert J. Flaherty.

### LAND, THE

1941 (sound)

American

*Production:* U.S. Dept. of Agriculture.

*Direction and Script:* Robert J. Flaherty.

*Photography:* Irving Lerner, Douglas Baker, Floyd Crosby, Charles  
Herbert.

*Editing:* Helen van Dongen.

*Music:* Richard Arnell.

### LAST SHOT, THE

1945 (sound)

Anglo-Dutch

*Production:* Ministry of Information.

*Direction and Photography:* John Ferno.

*Editing:* Jim Mellor.

*Music:* Guy Warrack.

*Commentary:* Arthur Calder-Marshall.

*Narration:* Valentine Dyal.

APPENDIX II  
LET THERE BE LIGHT

1945 (sound) American  
*Production:* Army Pictorial Service.  
*Direction:* Major John Huston.  
*Photography:* Stanley Cortez.

LISTEN TO BRITAIN

1942 (sound) British  
*Production:* Crown Film Unit.  
*Producer:* Ian Dalrymple.  
*Direction, Script and Editing:* Humphrey Jennings,  
Stewart McAllister.  
*Photography:* H. E. Fowle.

LONDON CAN TAKE IT

1940 (sound) British  
*Production:* Crown Film Unit.  
*Direction:* Harry Watt, Humphrey Jennings.  
*Photography:* Jonah Jones, H. E. Fowle.  
*Narration:* Quentin Reynolds.

LONDONERS, THE

1939 (sound) British  
*Production:* Realist Film Unit for British Commercial Gas Association.  
*Producer:* John Grierson.  
*Associate Producer:* Basil Wright.  
*Direction, Script and Editing:* John Taylor.  
*Photography:* A. E. Jeakins.  
*Verse:* W. H. Auden.

LOUISIANA STORY

1946-8 (sound) American  
*Production:* Robert J. Flaherty Productions Inc., for the Standard Oil Company.  
*Direction:* Robert J. Flaherty.  
*Script:* Robert J. Flaherty, Frances Flaherty.  
*Photography:* Richard Leacock.  
*Associate Producer and Editing:* Helen van Dongen.  
*Music:* Virgil Thomson.

## APPENDIX II

### MAN WITH THE MOVIE-CAMERA, THE

1928-9 (silent)

Soviet

*Production:* Vufku (Ukraine).

*Direction:* Dziga-Vertov.

*Photography:* M. Kauffmann.

*Assistant Editing:* E. Svilova.

### MERCHANT SEAMEN

1941 (sound)

British

*Production:* Crown Film Unit.

*Producer:* Cavalcanti.

*Direction and Script:* J. B. Holmes.

*Assistant Direction:* Ralph Elton.

*Photography:* H. E. Fowle.

*Design:* Edward Carrick.

*Editing:* R. Q. McNaughton.

*Music:* Constant Lambert.

### MOANA

1926 (silent)

American

*Production:* Famous-Players-Lasky (Paramount).

*Direction, Script and Photography:* Robert J. Flaherty.

### NANOOK OF THE NORTH

1922 (silent)

American

*Production:* Reveillon Frères.

*Direction, Script and Photography:* Robert J. Flaherty.

### NATIVE LAND

1942 (sound)

American

*Production:* Frontier Films.

*Direction and Script:* Leo Hurwitz, Paul Strand.

*Photography:* Paul Strand.

*Commentary:* David Wolff.

*Music:* Marc Blitzstein.

*With:* Paul Robeson, Fred Johnson, Mary George, Housely Stevens, Louis Grant, James Hanne, Howard da Silva, Tom Connors.

### NAZIS STRIKE, THE

1943 (sound)

American

*Production:* Orientation Branch of the U.S. War Department.

## APPENDIX II

*Direction:* Lt.-Col. Frank Capra, Major Anatole Litvak.

*Script:* Major Eric Knight, Capt. Anthony Veiller.

*Narration:* Walter Huston, Capt. Anthony Veiller.

*Editing:* Capt. William Hornbeck.

*Library Research:* Sgt. Richard Griffith.

*Music:* Dmitri Tiomkin.

(One of the *Why We Fight* series.)

## NEW EARTH

1931-4 (sound)

Dutch

*Production:* Capi.

*Direction and Script:* Joris Ivens.

*Photography:* Joris Ivens, John Fernhout, Piet Huiskens, Helen van Dongen.

*Editing:* Helen van Dongen.

*Music:* Hanns Eisler.

## NIGHT MAIL

1936 (sound)

British

*Production:* G.P.O. Film Unit.

*Producer:* John Grierson.

*Direction and Script:* Basil Wright, Harry Watt.

*Photography:* H. E. Fowle, Jonah Jones.

*Editing:* R. Q. McNaughton.

*Music:* Benjamin Britten.

*Verse:* W. H. Auden.

## NORTH SEA

1938 (sound)

British

*Production:* G.P.O. Film Unit.

*Producer:* Cavalcanti.

*Direction and Script:* Harry Watt.

*Photography:* H. E. Fowle, Jonah Jones.

*Design:* Edward Carrick.

*Editing:* R. Q. McNaughton.

*Music:* Ernst Meyer.

## NOW—THE PEACE

1945 (sound)

Canadian

*Production:* National Film Board of Canada.

## APPENDIX II

*Producer:* John Grierson.

*Direction and Editing:* Stuart Legg.

(One of the *World in Action* series.)

### OLVIDADOS, LOS

(*The Lost Ones*)

1950 (sound)

Mexican

*Production:* Ultramar Film.

*Producer:* Oscar Danciger.

*Direction:* Luis Buñuel.

*Script:* Luis Buñuel, Luis Alcoriza.

*Photography:* Gabriel Figueroa.

*Music:* Halffter.

### OPEN CITY

(*Roma, città aperta*)

1945 (sound)

Italian

*Production:* Excelsia Film.

*Direction:* Roberto Rossellini.

*Script and Dialogue:* Sergio Amidei, Federico Fellini.

*Photography:* Ubaldo Arata.

*Music:* Renzo Rossellini.

*With:* Aldo Fabrizzi, Anna Magnani, Marcello Pagliero, Vito Annicchiarico, Nando Bruno, Harry Feist, Giovanna Galletti, Maria Michi, C. Sindici, Van Hulzen.

### PALE HORSEMAN, THE

1946 (sound)

American

*Production:* U.S. Information Service.

*Direction and Script:* Irving Jacoby.

*Editing:* Peter Elgar.

*Music:* Henry Brant.

### PARIS 1900

1946-7 (sound)

French

*Production:* Panthéon-Production Pierre Braunberger.

*Direction and Script:* Nicole Védres.

*Editing:* Miriam, Yannick Bellon.

*Music:* Guy Bernard.

APPENDIX II  
PEOPLE IN THE CITY  
(*Människor i Stad*)

1947 (sound)

Swedish

*Production:* Svensk Filmindustri.

*Direction, Script and Photography:* Arne Sucksdorff.

*Music:* Stig Rybrant.

PLOW THAT BROKE THE PLAINS, THE

1936 (sound)

American

*Production:* Resettlement Administration, U.S. Government  
(Farming Security Administration).

*Direction, Script and Editing:* Pare Lorentz.

*Photography:* Paul Strand, Ralph Steiner, Leo T. Hurwitz.

*Music:* Virgil Thomson.

POWER AND THE LAND

1940 (sound)

American

*Production:* U.S. Film Service.

*Direction:* Joris Ivens.

*Script:* Edwin Locke.

*Photography:* Floyd Crosby, Arthur Ornitz.

*Commentary:* Stephen Vincent Benet.

*Music:* Douglas Moore.

PRELUDE TO WAR

1943 (sound)

American

*Production:* Orientation Branch of the U.S. War Department.

*Direction:* Major Frank Capra.

*Script:* Major Eric Knight, Capt. Anthony Veiller.

*Narration:* Walter Huston.

*Editing:* Capt. William Hornbeck.

*Library Research:* Sgt. Richard Griffith.

*Music:* Dmitri Tiomkin.

(One of the *Why We Fight* series.)

QUIET ONE, THE

1949 (sound)

American

*Production:* Film Documents Inc.

*Producer:* Janice Loeb.

## APPENDIX II

*Direction, Script and Editing:* Sidney Meyers.  
*Photography:* Richard Bagley, Helen Levitt.  
*Music:* Ulysses Kay.

### RIEN QUE LES HEURES

1926-7 (silent) French  
*Production:* Néofilm.  
*Direction, Script and Editing:* Cavalcanti.  
*Assistant Direction:* André Cerf.  
*Photography:* James E. Rogers.  
*Design:* M. Mirovitch.  
*Musical Accomp.:* Yves de la Casinière.  
*With:* Philippe Hériat, Nina Chouvalowa, Clifford MacLaglen.

### RAMPARTS WE WATCH, THE

1940 (sound) American  
*Production:* *March of Time*.  
*Direction:* Louis de Rochemont.  
*Editing:* Lothar Wolff.

### RIVER, THE

1937 (sound) American  
*Production:* Farm Security Administration, U.S. Government.  
*Direction, Script and Editing:* Pare Lorentz.  
*Photography:* Willard van Dyke, Stacey Woodard, Floyd Crosby.  
*Narration:* Thomas Chalmers.  
*Music:* Virgil Thomson.

### SAVING OF BILL BLEWITT, THE

1937 (sound) British  
*Production:* G.P.O. Film Unit.  
*Producer:* John Grierson.  
*Assistant Producer:* Cavalcanti.  
*Direction and Script:* Harry Watt.  
*Photography:* S. Onions, J. Jones.  
*Music:* Benjamin Britten.

### SCHOOL IN THE MAILBOX

1946 (sound) Australian  
*Production:* Australian National Film Board.  
*Direction:* Stanley Hawes.

## APPENDIX II

### SEVEN MILLION HORSE POWER

1943 (sound) Danish  
*Production:* Minerva Film for Burmeister and Wain.  
*Direction and Script:* Theodor Christensen.  
*Photography:* Jørgen Roos.  
*Music:* Kai Rosenberg.

### SHIPYARD

1934-5 (sound) British  
*Production:* G.B. Instructional for Orient Shipping Line.  
*Direction, Script and Editing:* Paul Rotha.  
*Photography:* George Pocknall, Frank Bundy, Frank Goodliffe,  
 Harry Rignold.

### SIEGE OF LENINGRAD, THE

1942 (sound) Soviet  
*Production:* Lenfilm Newsreel Studios.  
*Photography:* 22 Soviet cameramen.

### SONG OF CEYLON, THE

1934-5 (sound) British  
*Production:* Ceylon Tea Propaganda Board.  
*Producer:* John Grierson.  
*Direction, Script and Photography:* Basil Wright.  
*Assistant:* John Taylor.  
*Music:* Walter Leigh.

### SPANISH EARTH, THE

1937 (sound) American  
*Production:* Contemporary Historians, Inc.  
*Direction and Script:* Joris Ivens.  
*Commentary and Narration:* Ernest Hemingway.  
*Photography:* John Ferno.  
*Editing:* Helen van Dongen.  
*Music:* Marc Blitzstein, Virgil Thomson.

### STALINGRAD

1943 (sound) Soviet  
*Production:* Central Newsreel Studios.  
*Photography:* Soviet cameramen on the Don and Stalingrad fronts.

## APPENDIX II

*Editing:* Leonid Varlamov.

*Music:* V. Smirnov.

### TARGET FOR TONIGHT

1941 (sound)

British

*Production:* Crown Film Unit.

*Producer:* Ian Dalrymple.

*Direction and Script:* Harry Watt.

*Photography:* Jonah Jones, Edward Catford.

*Design:* Edward Carrick.

*Editing:* Stewart McAllister.

*Music:* Leighton Lucas.

### TEN DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD, THE (October)

1927-8 (silent)

Soviet

*Production:* Sovkino.

*Direction, Script and Editing:* S. M. Eisenstein, G. V. Alexandrov.

*Assistant Direction:* M. Shtraukh, M. Gomorov, Ilya Trauberg.

*Photography:* Eduard Tissé.

*Design:* Kovrigin.

*Musical score:* Edmund Meisel.

### THREE DAWNS TO SYDNEY

1948 (sound)

British

*Production:* Greenpark Productions for British Overseas Airways Corporation.

*Producers:* Ralph Keene, Paul Fletcher.

*Direction and Script:* John Eldridge.

*Photography:* Martin Curtis.

*Editing:* John Trumper.

*Music:* William Alwyn.

### TODAY AND TOMORROW

1945 (sound)

British

*Production:* World Wide Pictures for Ministry of Information.

*Producer:* Ralph Bond.

*Direction:* Robin Carruthers.

*Photography:* Cliff Hornby.

*Commentary:* Arthur Calder-Marshall.

*Narration:* Valentine Dyal, Colin Wills.

*Music:* William Alwyn.

## APPENDIX II

### TRANSFER OF POWER

1939 (sound) British  
*Production:* Shell Film Unit.  
*Producer:* Arthur Elton.  
*Direction, Script and Editing:* Geoffrey Bell.  
*Photography:* Sidney Beadle.  
*Diagrams:* Francis Rodker.

### TRIUMPH OF THE WILL, THE

1936 (sound) German  
*Production:* N.S.D.A.P.  
*Direction:* Leni Riefenstahl.  
*Direction of Photography:* Sepp Allgeier.

### TRUE GLORY, THE

1945 (sound) Anglo-American  
*Production:* Ministry of Information and U.S. Office of War Information.  
*Direction:* Carol Reed, Capt. Garson Kanin.  
*Script:* Major Eric Maschwitz, Arthur MacRae, Flt/O. Jenny Nicholson, Gerald Kersh, Sgt. Guy Trosper.  
*Research:* Capt. Peter Cusick.  
*Photography:* Army Film Unit and the American Army Pictorial Service.  
*Editing Supervision:* Lt. Robert Verrell.  
*Editing:* Sgt. Leiberwitz, Sgt. Bob Farrell, Sgt. Jerry Cowen, Sgt. Bob Carrick, Sgt. Bob Clarke.  
*Music:* William Alwyn.

### TURKSIB

1928 (silent) Soviet  
*Production:* Vostok Film.  
*Direction and Script:* Victor Turin.  
*Photography:* E. Slavinski, B. Sransisson.

### UNDEFEATED, THE

1950 (sound) British  
*Production:* World Wide Pictures for the Central Office of Information.  
*Producer:* James Carr.

## APPENDIX II

*Direction:* Paul Dickson.

*Script:* Paul Dickson. Ted Willis.

*Photography:* Ronald R. Anscombe.

*Editing:* Frances Cockburn.

*Music:* Lambert Williamson.

*Narration:* Leo Genn.

The part of Joe Anderson played by Gerald Pearson.

### VALLEY IS OURS, THE

1949 (sound)

Australian

*Production:* Australian National Film Board.

*Producer:* Stanley Hawes.

*Direction and Script:* John Heyer.

*Photography:* Frank Bagnall.

*Music:* John Kay.

### VOICES OF MALAYA

1948 (sound)

British

*Production:* Crown Film Unit.

*Direction and Script:* Ralph Elton, Terry Trench.

*Assistant Direction:* Clive Freedman, Yussef Khan, Lie Meow Seong.

*Commentary:* V. S. Pritchett.

*Photography:* Denny Densham.

*Editing:* Jean McKenzie, Paul Shortall.

*Music:* Elizabeth Lutyens.

### WATERS OF TIME, THE

1951 (sound)

British

*Production:* Internationalist Realist Ltd., for the Port of London Authority.

*Producer:* Basil Wright.

*Direction, Script and Editing:* Basil Wright, Bill Launder.

*Photography:* Reg Hughes, Cyril Moorhead.

*Words by:* Paul Dehn.

*Narration:* James McKechnie, Paul Dehn, Felix Felton, John Slater.

*Music:* Alan Rawsthorne.

APPENDIX II  
WAVE, THE

1934-5 (sound) Mexican  
*Production:* Department of Fine Arts, Mexican Government.  
*General Supervision and Photography:* Paul Strand.  
*Script:* Carlos Chavez, Velazquez, Henwar Rodakiewicz.  
*Editing:* Gunther von Fritsch.  
*Music:* Sylvestre Revueltas.

WE LIVE IN TWO WORLDS

1937 (sound) British  
*Production:* G.P.O. Film Unit.  
*Producer:* John Grierson.  
*Direction:* Cavalcanti.  
*Photography:* John Taylor.  
*Editing:* R. Q. McNaughton.  
*Narration:* J. B. Priestley.  
*Music:* Maurice Jaubert.

WEALTH OF THE WORLD. NO. 1. OIL

1950 (sound) British  
*Production:* Pathe Documentary Unit (in association with Film Centre).  
*Producer:* Peter Bayliss.  
*Direction:* Grahame Tharp.  
*Script:* Jack Howells.  
*Editing:* Maurice Harley.  
*Music:* Thomas Henderson.  
(One of the *Wealth of the World* series.)

WEATHER FORECAST

1934 (sound) British  
*Production:* G.P.O. Film Unit.  
*Producer:* John Grierson.  
*Direction and Script:* Evelyn Spice.  
*Photography:* George Noble.  
*Sound:* Cavalcanti.

WESTERN APPROACHES

1944 (sound) British  
*Production:* Crown Film Unit.

## APPENDIX II

*Producer:* Ian Dalrymple.  
*Direction:* Pat Jackson.  
*Script:* Pat Jackson, Gerry Bryant.  
*Photography:* Jack Cardiff.  
*Design:* Edward Carrick.  
*Music:* Clifton Parker.  
(in Technicolor)

### WORLD IS RICH, THE

1946-7 (sound) British  
*Production:* Films of Fact for Central Office of Information.  
*Producer, Direction and Editing:* Paul Rotha.  
*Associate-direction and editing:* Michael Orrom.  
*Script:* Arthur Calder-Marshall.  
*Photography:* James Ritchie.  
*Diagrams:* Isotype Institute.  
*Narration:* James McKechnie, Valentine Dyll, Allan Michey,  
Robert Adams, Elizabeth Cowell, Leonard Sachs, Roy  
Plomley.  
*Music:* Clifton Parker.  
*Library Research:* Michael Clarke.

### WORLD OF PLENTY

1942-3 (sound) British  
*Production:* Paul Rotha Productions for Ministry of Information.  
*Producer, Direction and Editing:* Paul Rotha.  
*Script:* Eric Knight, Paul Rotha.  
*Additional Dialogue:* Miles Malleon.  
*Associate-director:* Yvonne Fletcher.  
*Photography:* Peter Hennessy, Wolfgang Suschitzky.  
*Diagrams:* Isotype Institute.  
*Narration:* Eric Knight, E. V. H. Emmett, Robert St John,  
Thomas Chalmers, Henry Hallatt.  
*Music:* William Alwyn.  
*American sequences shot by:* *March of Time.*  
Part of Housewife played by Marjorie Rhodes.

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